

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



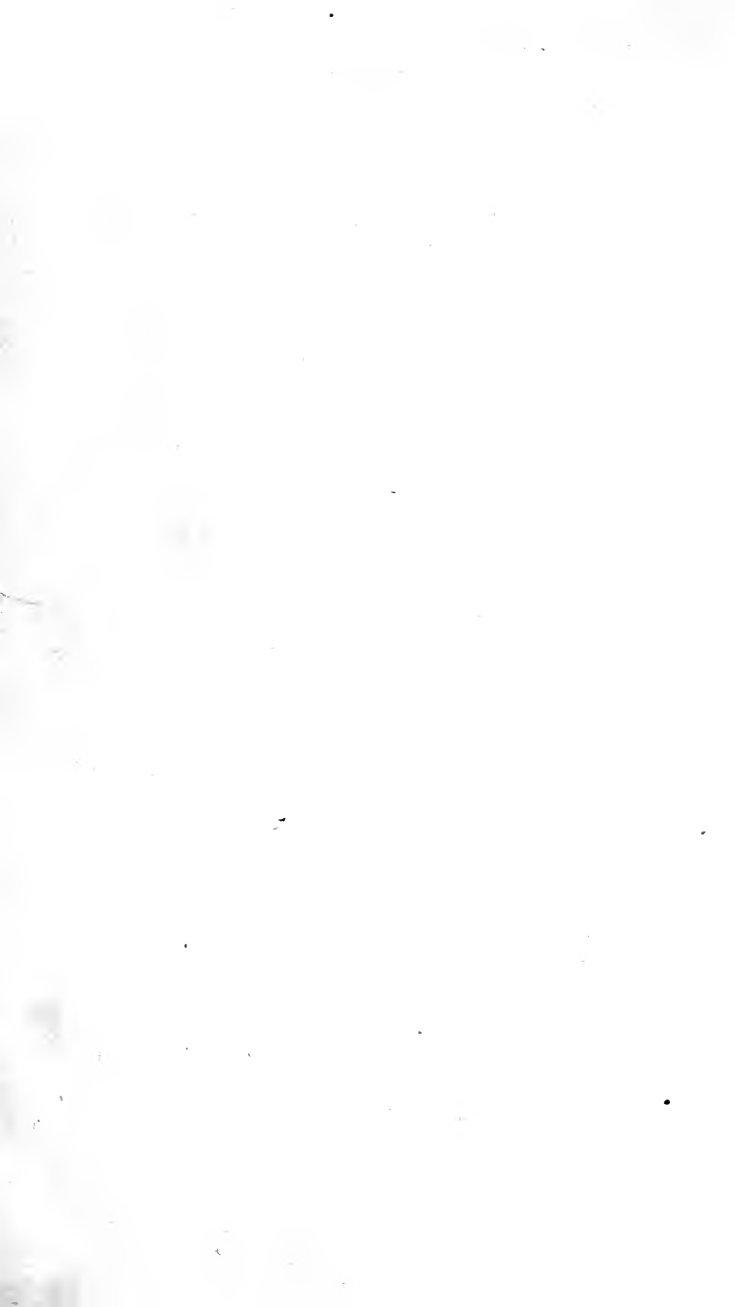
3 1761 01729308 5

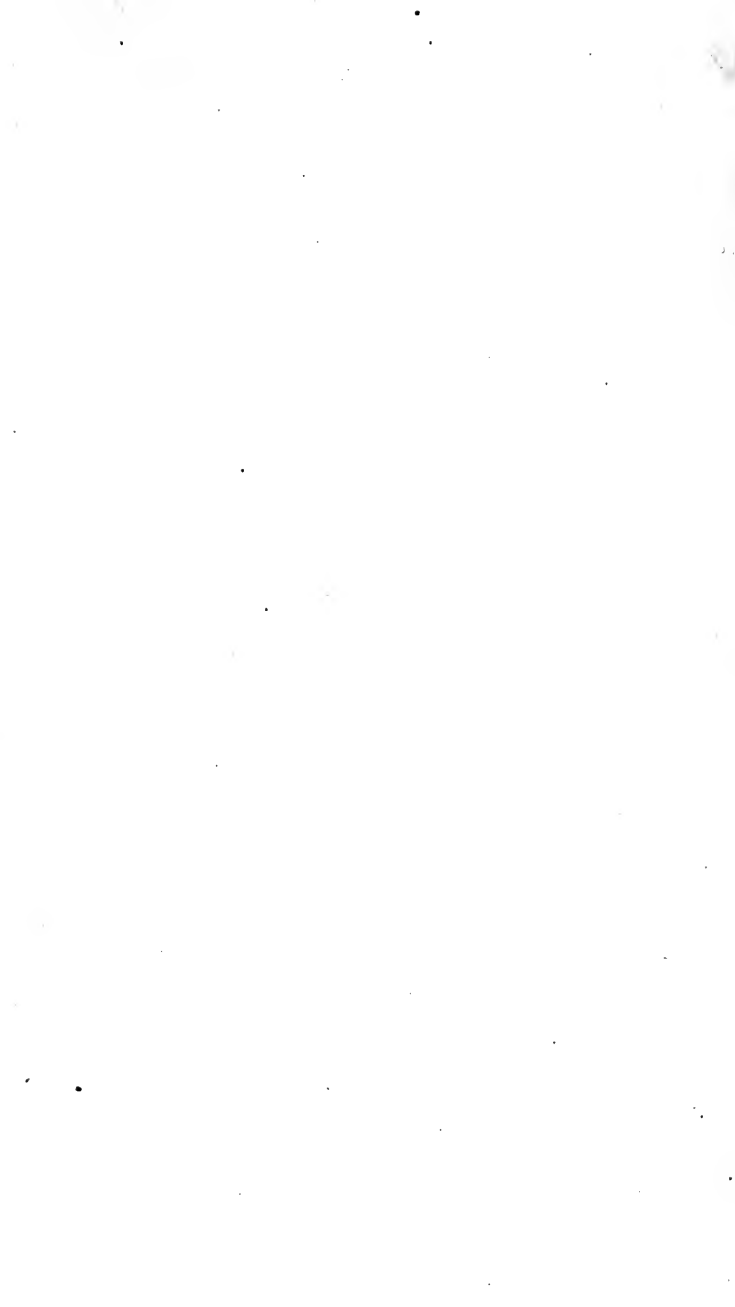


Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation









ak.Gr  
1463r

# THE RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

BY  
CARROLL LEWIS MAXCY, M. A.

*Morris Professor of Rhetoric in Williams College*



BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

125-14 2  
20/11/1

COPYRIGHT, 1911, BY CARROLL LEWIS MAXCY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

**TO**  
**THE MEMBERS OF "ENGLISH 3"**  
**WHOSE CORDIAL INTEREST HAS ENCOURAGED**  
**THE PREPARATION OF THESE**  
**DISCOURSES**



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	ix
I. DEFINITION . . . . .	1
NARRATION IN ITS RELATIONS TO THE OTHER	
FORMS OF DISCOURSE . . . . .	6
I. Narration and Exposition . . . . .	6
II. Narration and Argumentation . . . . .	12
III. Narration and Description . . . . .	13
IV. Summary . . . . .	18
II. ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVE FORM . . . . .	20
III. GENERAL RHETORICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF	
NARRATIVE FORMS . . . . .	29
A. THE NARRATIVE ITEM . . . . .	29
I. Unity . . . . .	29
II. Emphasis . . . . .	31
III. Coherence . . . . .	37
(a) The Structure and Ordering of the	
Sentences . . . . .	38
(b) The Ordering of the Narrative De-	
tails . . . . .	46
B. EPISODIC NARRATION . . . . .	50
I. Unity . . . . .	50
II. Emphasis . . . . .	53
III. Proportion . . . . .	56
IV. Coherence . . . . .	58

IV. THE BACKGROUND OF THE ACTION: SETTING	63
SETTING DEFINED . . . . .	67
EXPOSITORY AND DRAMATIC SETTING . . . . .	67
Local Color . . . . .	82
Atmosphere . . . . .	85
Symbolic Setting . . . . .	87
Undue Elaboration of Setting . . . . .	90
Development of Setting in Narrative Writing	101
V. THE AGENT OF THE ACTION: CHARACTER	107
DEFINITION OF "CHARACTER" . . . . .	107
DIRECT CHARACTERIZATION . . . . .	114
INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION . . . . .	116
(a) Characterization by Action . . . . .	119
(b) Characterization by Speech, etc. . . . .	123
(c) Characterization by Environment . . . . .	143
RHETORICAL QUALITIES IN CHARACTERIZA-	
TION . . . . .	146
Clearness . . . . .	146
Unity . . . . .	150
Coherence . . . . .	172
VI. THE ORDERING OF THE ACTION: PLOT . . . . .	178
DEFINITIONS . . . . .	178
RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN PLOT STRUCTURE	182
Unity . . . . .	183
(a) Definition of Plot Unity . . . . .	183
(b) Unity in Complication . . . . .	188
(c) Point of View in Plot Structure . . . . .	193
Coherence . . . . .	199
Climax . . . . .	201
(a) The Method of Chronicle . . . . .	203



# CONTENTS

vii

(b) The Method of Drama . . . . .	205
(c) The Method of Story . . . . .	219
Emphasis . . . . .	224
(a) Massing . . . . .	225
(b) Proportion . . . . .	233
(c) Definiteness . . . . .	237
<b>VII. FORMS OF NARRATIVE LITERATURE . . . . .</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>I. THE NARRATIVE OF FACT . . . . .</b>	<b>239</b>
History . . . . .	239
Biography . . . . .	250
<b>II. THE NARRATIVE OF IMAGINATION . . . . .</b>	<b>254</b>
The Novel . . . . .	254
The Short-story . . . . .	261
<b>INDEX . . . . .</b>	<b>275</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 . . . . .	68
Figure 2 . . . . .	189
Figure 3 . . . . .	191
Figure 4 . . . . .	207
Figure 5 . . . . .	209
Figure 6 . . . . .	210
Figure 7 . . . . .	211
Figure 8 . . . . .	212
Figure 9 . . . . .	215
Figure 10 . . . . .	216
Figure 11 . . . . .	221
Figure 12 . . . . .	222
Figure 13 . . . . .	224
Figure 14 . . . . .	230
Figure 15 . . . . .	231



## INTRODUCTION

THOSE of us who have experienced the perilous delights of learning to ride a bicycle will recall the suspense that attended the discovery of some obstacle or pitfall in the path. The whole roadway was before us where to choose; yet surely and swiftly we would bear down upon the very object that it was our whole purpose to shun. In ordering the pages that follow, I have often seemed to renew these experiences. It has been my purpose to set forth the rhetorical principles of narrative composition, not to prepare another manual on the novel and the short-story; that has already been done often and well. It has seemed, however, that there might be a place for examining the broader field that includes not only fiction but history, biography, and all forms of composition the purpose of which is to set in order the details of an occurrence. Yet the novel and the short-story have constantly obtruded themselves. From its very character, its broader emotional appeal, fiction furnishes by far the most effective illustration of narrative principles. And I fear, therefore, lest these narrative types have too frequently been made unduly prominent. If this be the case, it is in spite of deliberate effort to avoid the danger, and not because the danger was unforeseen.

The charge is often brought against college courses in composition that they are barren, — they do not inspire literary masterpieces. "Show us your novelists, your poets," exclaims the critic. Yet courses in mathematics, in physics, in the modern languages, are not

decried, because in each graduating class we fail to find Euclids, Newtons, Goethes, and Molières. As a matter of fact, intelligent appreciation is a very important function of the so-called "advanced courses in composition." And the student of structure and style may indeed gain an appreciative insight into the work of the master, if he attempts to do in a small way what the master has done in a large way. We can always better judge any kind of work if we have tried our own hand at it, even though our efforts may not be crowned by the Academy.

The course of study, then, that is outlined in the following pages may well be accompanied by exercises in composition: in setting, in characterization, in the ordering of plot-material. But extensive reading should attend the work of composition; it will serve as a basis for discussion, illustration, and imitation. Few courses offer better material for arousing interest in good literature than does a course in narrative composition. Every student is interested in story and in history, and open discussion of narrative principles, particularly of characterization, frequently results in intelligent enthusiasm for what is really excellent, and simultaneously develops a distaste for the superficial and "trashy" narratives that are all too common. It is needless, perhaps, to add that in this work the text-book must serve merely as a definite starting-point; the inspiration must come from the teacher.

A course of parallel readings that has been tested by an experience of several years embraces one work of historical character, one biography, one novel, and thirty or forty short-stories. The following specific works have been found adapted to a course of this character: —

- HISTORY:** Creasy: *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World.*  
Macaulay: chap. i of the *History of England.*  
Prescott: *Conquest of Peru.*
- BIOGRAPHY:** Lockhart: *Life of Scott.*  
Morley: *English Men of Letters.*  
Palmer: *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer.*
- THE NOVEL:** Allen: *The Choir Invisible.*  
Dickens: *Hard Times; Barnaby Rudge.*  
Eliot: *Adam Bede.*  
Hardy: *Far from the Madding Crowd; The Return of the Native.*  
Trollope: *Barchester Towers.*
- THE SHORT-STORY:** Aldrich: *Marjorie Daw.*  
Allen: *Flute and Violin.*  
Anstey: *The Black Poodle.*  
Balzac: *A Passion of the Desert.*  
*La Grande Bretèche.*  
Bunner: *A Sisterly Scheme.*  
Dickens: *A Child's Dream of a Star.*  
Freeman: *A New England Nun.*  
*The Revolt of Mother.*  
Garland: *Up the Coolly.*  
Hardy: *The Withered Arm.*  
*The Three Strangers.*  
*The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion.*  
Harte: *The Outcasts of Poker Flat.*  
*Tennessee's Partner.*  
Hawthorne: *The Great Stone Face.*  
*The Birthmark.*  
Hewlett: *Madonna of the Peach Tree.*  
Hope (Hawkins): *The Dolly Dialogues*  
(selections).  
Irving: *Rip Van Winkle.*  
Kipling: *The Man who would be King.*

## INTRODUCTION

- THE SHORT-STORY: Kipling: *Without Benefit of Clergy*.  
 Matthews: *Vignettes of Manhattan* (selections).  
 Maupassant: *The Necklace*.  
                   *The Piece of String*.  
                   *The Man with the Blue Eyes*.  
                   *The Coward*.  
 Merimée: *Mateo Falcone*.  
 Morrison: *On the Stairs*.  
                   *The Omnibus*.  
 Poe: *The Gold-Bug*.  
                   *The Fall of the House of Usher*.  
                   *The Cask of Amontillado*.  
 Smith: *A Night Out*.  
                   *Boggs becomes Dramatic* ("The Wood-Fire in No. 3").  
 Stevenson: *The Merry Men*.  
                   *Markheim*.  
 Stockton: *The Lady or the Tiger?*  
 Turgeneff: *A Lear of the Steppes*.
- .
- The Bible: *Ruth*, *Esther*, and selections *ad lib*.  
*Gesta Romanorum*: selections.  
*The Arabian Nights*: selections.

My obligations are many. One cannot discuss the principles herein considered and fail to recognize indebtedness to Professors Barrett Wendell and Bliss Perry of Harvard, Professor Charles S. Baldwin of Columbia, and many others. I have endeavored, in the text, to give credit for such indebtedness, and in the footnotes I have specified the various publishers who have courteously allowed the use of copyrighted matter.

I take this opportunity also of expressing to my

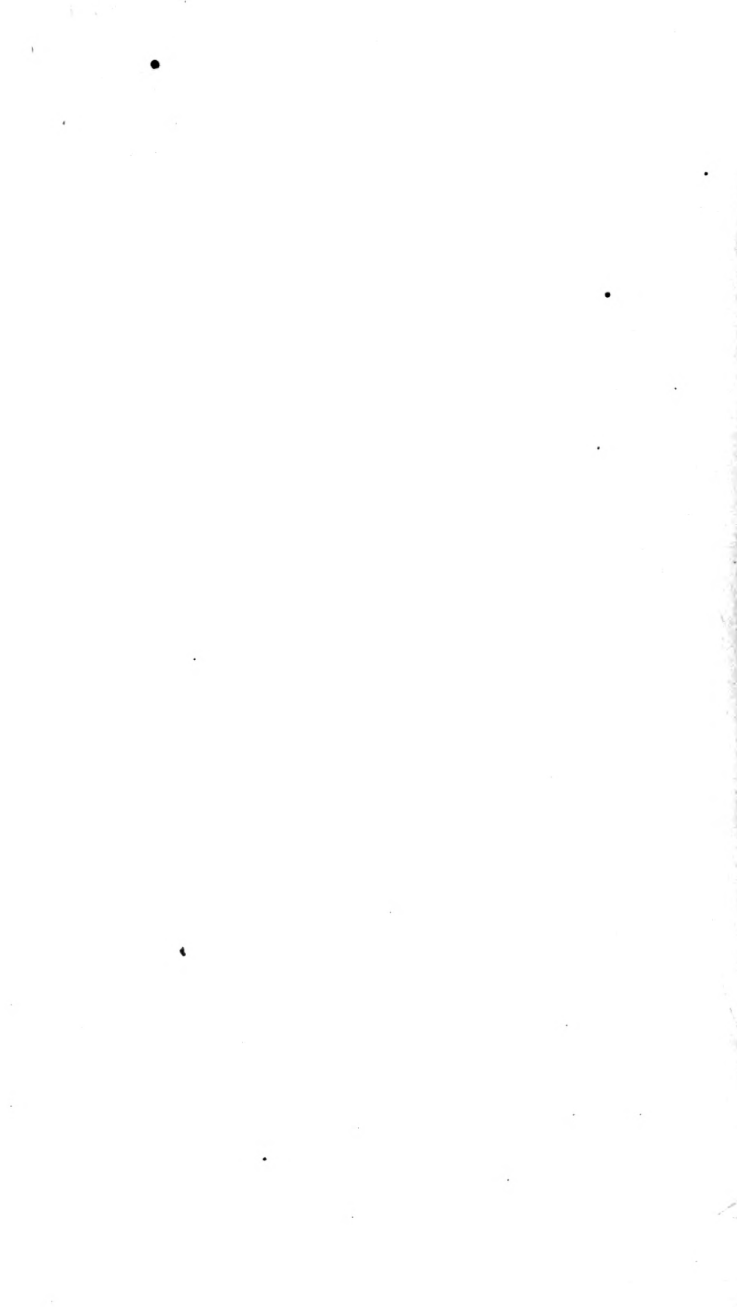
colleagues — especially to Samuel E. Allen, M.A. and George B. Dutton, Ph.D. — my obligations for their valuable and generous assistance in preparing this work for publication.

C. L. M.

WILLIAMS COLLEGE

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

*April 22, 1911*





# THE RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

## CHAPTER I

### DEFINITION

Narration "recounts the particulars of an occurrence, or makes a statement of facts, in chronological order." — *Standard Dictionary*.

Narration is "an orderly recital of the details and particulars of some transaction or event, or of some series of transactions or events." — *Century Dictionary*.

"Narration is the recounting, in succession, of the particulars that together make up a transaction." — GENUNG: *Working Principles of Rhetoric*.

AN examination of these three definitions, which may fairly be called typical, reveals the two underlying principles of all narrative writing: (a) the conception of a unit, variously termed an "occurrence," a "transaction," and an "event"; and (b) the successive details that constitute this unit, arranged in their chronological order, in an "orderly recital," in a "series."

From these essential parts of the three definitions in question it becomes apparent that the time-element plays a very important part in the process of narration, indeed, that it is fundamental. The unit variously denominated as an "occurrence," a "transaction," an "event," is from its very nature temporal. It indicates a circumstance that presents itself in the course of time; it is generally a part of some larger temporal whole, — it may be of an era, or of a life, or of a mere brief experi-

## 2. RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

ence, as illustrated respectively by Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Southey's *Life of Nelson*, or Hawthorne's *Ambitious Guest*. And in the second part of the definitions, the various terms "chronological order," "orderly recital," and "series" show again that time is an ultimate element, essential in that it determines the very order of the constituent parts. As logical relations underlie argumentative composition, and as spatial relations often are essential to expository composition, so the various considerations that arise in connection with narration depend fundamentally upon the time-element.

In illustration of what has been presented with reference to the definition of narration let us examine rather analytically two or three examples. The first is taken quite at random from a daily paper.

### LEAPS TO HIS DEATH

*Middletown, Del., July 11.* Imagining he saw the headlight of another engine coming toward him, Randolph A. Wheeler, a Delaware railroad engineer, driving a freight train, clapped on the brakes and leaped from the cab. Startled by the sudden action of the engineer, the fireman, without looking for the danger, also threw himself from the engine. The train came to a standstill and the conductor was surprised to find the engine-cab deserted. The dead engineer and the injured fireman were then found lying along the track.

Here, to apply the terminology used in the definition quoted from the *Standard Dictionary*, we have (a) the "occurrence," which we may perhaps entitle "The tragic death of Randolph A. Wheeler," and which we may view as but part of a larger temporal whole, "The life of Randolph A. Wheeler"; or, from another point of

view, "The events of July 11." More than this "occurrence," we have also (b) the "particulars of the occurrence arranged in chronological order," viz.: (1) the fancied vision of the approaching engine; (2) the clapping on of the brakes; (3) the leap from the cab; (4) the fireman's fright; (5) the sudden stopping of the train; (6) the conductor's amazement at finding the cab deserted; (7) the discovery of the dead engineer and the injured fireman.

The same fundamental elements are equally evident in more extended narrative writing; the short-story, for example, as illustrated in Maupassant's *Necklace*. In this case, applying the terms of the second definition, that from the *Century Dictionary*, we discover the "transaction" or "event," in the episode indicated by the title, — the loss and restoration of the diamond necklace. The "details" and "particulars" presented in "orderly recital" appear in the various items of the story itself, as contained in the sections into which it is usually subdivided. They may be indicated by the following titles: —

- I. Madame Loisel's Discontent.
- II. The Invitation to the Ministerial Ball.
- III. The Loan of the Necklace.
- IV. The Loss. •
- V. The Restitution.
- VI. The Ten-Years' Struggle.
- VII. Revelation.

Again, we may discover the same underlying elements in the most elaborate forms of narrative literature, — the novel, for example. If we examine George Eliot's *Silas Marner* in the light of Professor Genung's definition, we may say that the story in its entirety concerns

#### 4 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

a "transaction," which we may entitle "The regeneration of Silas Marner, the weaver of Raveloe," a complete episode occurring within the broader circle of "rustic England in the previous century." Furthermore, the story consists in "recounting in succession the particulars that together make up this transaction," — such particulars, — to mention but a few out of many, — as (a) Marner's life at Lantern Yard; (b) his removal to Raveloe; (c) his miserly isolation; (d) the theft of his gold; (e) the entrance of Eppie into his life; (f) his love and care for the child; (g) Eppie's rejection of her father; (h) Marner's closing years.

Thus in all forms of what may be called narrative composition, ultimate analysis reveals these two fundamental elements, — the unified, single occurrence, and the constituent details arranged in due order.

In view of the foregoing considerations, it is interesting to observe how, at the outset, in the very terms of the definition, we are confronted with the two important rhetorical considerations, unity and coherence, considerations always important, but from its very character peculiarly essential to narrative writing. Later in the discussion they will be viewed at greater length; at this point, however, they may receive general consideration.

In the term "occurrence" or "event," the idea of unity is implied; that is, of oneness, of subordination of details to one central idea. And in the ordering of the constituent "particulars in their chronological succession" lies the core idea of coherence; that is, of marshaling parts so as to attain culmination.

If the writer has in mind no clearly defined central theme, no definite "event," his narrative will be characterized by indefiniteness, by seemingly unrelated

digressions, by apparent want of purpose. And, on the other hand, carelessness in ordering the constituent details so that the due relation of parts is not well defined results in looseness and a general tone of carelessness. The reader's attention is led far afield, and the story makes for no distinct climax.

The indefiniteness resulting from failure to observe the first essential is illustrated in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, in which the simultaneous existence of at least three sets of characters leaves the reader in considerable doubt as to just what constitutes the main theme. For a similar reason some readers are offended with De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short*: they cannot distinguish the unified idea with which the author is dealing. A narrative like Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, however, or a successful biography like *The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer* has a motive so distinct that essential unity of composition is evident from the outset.

The looseness of narrative structure that results from inattention to the detail of coherence is well exemplified in many of Dickens's works. More than one reader of *Bleak House* has speedily become so involved in attempting to follow the varying fortunes of the celebrated chancery case, the adventures of Jo, of Lady Dedlock, of Mr. Skimpole, of the Snagsbys, the Jellybys, and the Smallweeds, that he has given up in despair the hopeless task of ever freeing himself from the tangle. On the contrary, the directness with which the successive details of *Treasure Island* or of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes make for their goal illustrates the effectiveness that comes from orderly arrangement well sustained. History, when well written, offers good evidence of how much is gained by narrative coherence properly observed, for in this form of composition chronological order is

## 6 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

supplemented by the exposition of cause and effect; the historian shows wherein the events of one period are but the logical consequences of those that have preceded. Saintsbury refers to this principle when he writes of Gibbon that he ordered his matter so effectively that the result is no mere congeries of unrelated fact but a "regular structure of history, informed and governed throughout by a philosophic idea." Similarly in histories of English literature the writer, in grouping his discussion under various "periods," is unconsciously marshaling the various details into the proper array to render effective his narrative treatment. In this case, as in the case of the historian, he not only shows the chronological sequence of the Elizabethan, Puritan, Restoration, and Eighteenth Century eras, but he makes his sequence more effective by showing that one stage of literary activity prepares the way for its successor and merges into it without jar or interruption. All this somewhat critical consideration is reducible to a proper regard for the second requirement that we have found inherent in the very definition of narration.

### NARRATION IN ITS RELATIONS TO THE OTHER FORMS OF DISCOURSE

#### I. Narration and Exposition

In the light of the definitions already presented, it will appear that narration differs essentially from exposition, or the setting forth of a term, the meaning or application of which may not be clear. In the one case we are concerned with the temporal relations of one part to another, with the sequence of event after event; in the other, with logical relations, cause and effect, signification or extent of terms, — with the process of elucidation.

tion. For instance, the following paragraph from Bryce's *American Commonwealth* presents an exposition of the term "the general education of the American people"; that is, it sets forth that term for the purpose of increased clearness of apprehension.

The Americans are an educated people, compared with the whole mass of the population in any European country except Switzerland, parts of Germany, Iceland, and Scotland; that is to say, the average of knowledge is higher, the habit of reading and thinking more generally diffused, than in any other country. (I speak, of course, of the native Americans, excluding negroes and recent immigrants.) They know the Constitution of their own country, they follow public affairs, they join in local government and learn from it how government must be carried on, and in particular how discussion must be conducted in meetings, and its results tested in elections. The Town Meeting has been the most perfect school of self-government in any modern country. In villages, they still exercise their minds on theological questions, debating points of Christian doctrine with no small acuteness. Women, in particular, though their chief reading is fiction and theology, pick up at the public schools and from the popular magazines far more miscellaneous information than the women of any European country possess, and this naturally tells on the intelligence of the men.<sup>1</sup>

The systematic and orderly character of the expository method as illustrated in this paragraph will be apparent from a glance at the skeleton that underlies the selection: —

#### GENERAL EDUCATION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

- I. Comparison with education among Europeans.
- II. General information among Americans.

<sup>1</sup> From *The American Commonwealth*. Copyright, 1894. Used by permission of the publishers, The Macmillan Company.

## 8 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

### A. On political matters.

1. Knowledge of the Constitution.
2. Familiarity with public affairs.
3. Knowledge of self government.

Participation in government, public discussions, etc.

### B. On theological matters.

Frequent discussions of doctrinal questions,

## III. Unusual intelligence of American women.

### A. General reading.

1. Fiction and theology.
2. Current magazine literature.

### B. Public school education.

### C. Influence on men.

From this outline it is clear that the function of the passage in question is to set forth the coördination and subordination of the various constituent elements that enter into the scope of the term under consideration. After reading the paragraph one understands more clearly what constitutes the "general education of the American people," what the writer means by the term.

The entire work from which the paragraph is selected, *The American Commonwealth* itself, presents a more complete and typical example of the expository method. It is, in fact, but an elucidation of the term indicated by the title; it considers the subject in all of its essential component parts — state and national government, political parties, social organization, etc., etc. Narration, on the other hand, were it directed at the same subject, would note the chronological order of successive events, and would produce a *history* of the United States. Bryce is an expositor; Fiske, a narrator.

Matthew Arnold's famous essay, *Sweetness and Light*, is another example of the expository method. It ex-



pounds the term "culture," defines it, analyzes it, differentiates it from the antonym "Philistinism," or modern materialism, and all for greater clearness of comprehension on the part of the reader.

*Silas Marner* has already been used as an illustration of the narrative method. Were a critic to discuss "the regeneration of the weaver of Raveloe" from the expository point of view, he would endeavor to explain the fitness of the word "regeneration" as applied to Silas's peculiar spiritual experiences. Upon completing the exposition, a reader, — presumably already familiar with the narrative of Marner's life, — would be satisfied that the term had been fitly applied.

But all writing that has for its aim to set forth a term needing explanation is not of necessity so unmistakably expository as might seem to be the case from the examples just cited. Exposition has many *methods*, and among them narration sometimes plays a part, as in the following paragraph from *The Mountains of California* by John Muir. The subject is the life history of a mountain lake.

When a mountain lake is born, — when, like a young eye, it first opens to the light; — it is an irregular, expressionless crescent, enclosed in banks of rock and ice, — bare, glaciated rock on the lower side, the rugged snout of a glacier on the upper. In this condition it remains for many a year, until at length, toward the end of some auspicious cluster of seasons, the glacier recedes beyond the upper margin of the basin, leaving it open from shore to shore for the first time, thousands of years after its conception beneath the glacier that excavated its basin. The landscape, cold and bare, is reflected in its pure depths; the winds ruffle its glassy surface, and the sun fills it with throbbing spangles, while its waves begin to lap and murmur around its leafless shores, — sun spangles during the day

## 10 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

and reflected stars at night its only flowers, the wind and the snow its only visitors. Meanwhile, the glacier continues to recede; and numerous rills, still younger than the lake itself, bring down glacier-mud, sand-grains, and pebbles, giving rise to margin-rings and plats of soil. To these fresh soil-beds comes many a waiting plant — first, a hardy carex with arching leaves and a spike of brown flowers; then, as the seasons grow warmer, and the soil-beds deeper and wider, other sedges take their appointed places; and these are joined by blue gentians, daisies, dodecatheons, violets, honeyworts, and many a lowly moss. Shrubs also hasten in time to the new gardens, — kalmia with its glossy leaves and purple flowers, the arctic willow, making soft woven carpets, together with the heathy bryanthus and cassiope, the fairest and dearest of them all. Insects now enrich the air; frogs pipe cheerily in the shallows, soon followed by the ousel, which is the first bird to visit the glacier lake, as the sedge is the first of plants.

So the young lake grows in beauty, becoming more and more humanly lovable from century to century. Groves of aspen spring up, and hardy pines, and the hemlock spruce, until it is richly overshadowed and embowered. But while its shores are being enriched, the soil-beds creep out with incessant growth, contracting its area while the lighter mud-particles deposited on the bottom cause it to grow constantly shallower, until at length the last remnant of the lake vanishes, — closed forever in ripe and natural old age.<sup>1</sup>

It might seem at first that this passage is narrative, but a little consideration will show that the writer's ultimate purpose is not to tell a story about a mountain-lake; rather it is to elucidate the geologic process of *lake formation*, and for this elucidation he chooses the narrative form for its greater dramatic effect. That is, he uses narrative means for the better accomplishment of an

<sup>1</sup> From *The Mountains of California*, by John Muir. By permission of The Century Co.

expository end. So with all passages of this character, in which the question may arise, Is it narration (expository) or exposition (narrative)? we have but to determine the *ultimate purpose* of the composition in question.

In determining this essential point it is sometimes of assistance to discover whether the passage under consideration deals with particular, individual events, of value in and for themselves, or whether they are general, typical of the entire class to which they belong. For example, contrast the following paragraph from Macaulay's *History of England* with that already cited from Muir: —

But the king suffered the auspicious moment to pass away; and it never returned. In August, 1643, he sate down before the city of Gloucester. That city was defended by the inhabitants and by the garrison, with a determination such as had not, since the commencement of the war, been shown by the adherents of the Parliament. The emulation of London was excited. The train-bands of the City volunteered to march wherever their forces might be required. A great force was speedily collected, and began to move westward. The siege of Gloucester was raised. The Royalists in every part of the kingdom were disheartened: the spirit of the Parliamentary party revived; and the apostate Lords, who had lately fled from Westminster to Oxford, hastened back from Oxford to Westminster.

As forms of composition these two passages are wholly unlike. Each is constructed, indeed, on the narrative principle; in each we have the orderly recital of the details that constitute a transaction, — the one "The life-story of a mountain lake," the other "The siege of Gloucester," — but in the selection from Macaulay the details are specific and particular in that they apply to an episode of the Civil War, to the siege of a certain city in 1643, not to wars and sieges in general; whereas the

## 12 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

passage from Muir, although chronological in arrangement, refers to *a* mountain lake in general, and is applicable to any and all mountain lakes of a certain character. The purpose of the paragraph is to explain the term "mountain lake," to elucidate the process of formation. In view, then, of the fact that the passage from Macaulay concerns itself with a specific event, that its main purpose is not to explain, not to interpret the subject into more intelligible terms, but rather to chronicle the details that constitute the event in question, one does not hesitate to class it as narration. And as the passage from Muir, although seemingly specific in application, is in reality general; as, although it seems to concern itself with the details of an occurrence, it in fact sets forth a process true of each member of a class; as it is merely a rather dramatic method of explanation, one does not hesitate to call it exposition. In the end, the question of ultimate purpose determines the rhetorical classification.

### II. Narration and Argumentation

Between narration and argumentation there is less likelihood of confusion than between narration and exposition. Argument has to do with demonstrating the truth or falsity of a given proposition, and between this process and the orderly arrangement of the temporal details that constitute an event there is little in common. Yet it is clear that narration will often serve as an effective method of establishing the premises that lead to a conclusion. To show the guilt of an accused person it may be necessary to narrate the incidents upon which the charge is based; to demonstrate the futility of a proposed act of legislation the citation of the instances in which similar legislation has in the past proved ineffect-

ive may furnish the surest kind of evidence. In all such cases, however, one will do well to bear in mind that the ultimate purpose of the forensic or of the appeal is to establish the proposition at issue, and that, in consequence, although the means may be narrative in character, the end is argumentative.

Illustrations of this narrative form for argumentative ends abound in forensic literature. For example, in his famous *Defence of Lord Gordon* Lord Erskine follows in detail the actions of John Hay from one day to another during the disturbances in London, chronicling incident after incident, but all for the purpose of proving that the witness was a popish spy, that his statements were thoroughly self-contradictory, that his testimony should be rejected. Added effect results from the narrative presentation, but the end in view is conviction by means of refutation; in other words, it is ultimately argumentative.

### III. Narration and Description

Exposition and argumentation have been grouped together as constituting "logical composition" on the ground that each appeals to the laws of thought rather than to the æsthetic or appreciative sense. Description, on the other hand, has with narration been termed "the literature of feeling," in that "personal experience of individual people is the subject matter of all this kind of writing."<sup>1</sup> It does not matter whether the writer is narrating his own experiences or spinning a yarn of adventure in search of treasure hidden in some imaginary island in the Spanish Main; whether he is picturing the house of his neighbor across the way or essaying to phrase in words his vision of some Castle Perilous, some

<sup>1</sup> *Forms of Prose Literature*: Gardiner, p. 106.

## 14 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

chamber-tower in Astolat; — in any case, he finds his material in the constant stream of consciousness that we call experience.<sup>2</sup> But for another reason, too, narration comes into closer relations with description than with the other literary forms. Narration, presenting the various details of an event, gains in effectiveness if these details can be projected against suitable background. Such background description provides, and, in consequence, is in almost constant attendance upon narration. It is true, we can find examples of pure description, of description drawn solely for the sake of æsthetic delight in a picture presented with no thought of rendering more effective an expository, an argumentative, or a narrative idea. The following lines present a good instance of pure description, — a picture and nothing else, for the selection is complete in itself: —

### THE SWEAT SHOP

Low ceilings, mildewed with the reeking damp,  
The walls hung thick with ill-assorted clothes;  
Small window-panes with frames that vex and cramp,  
Small, sputtering gas-lights, bracketed in rows.  
The noisy whirr of wheels and leathern bands  
That turn incessantly. The snap of shears  
Wielded by large, rough-knuckled, grimy hands,  
And through the door, to straining, eager ears,  
The hum of traffic and the huckster's cry —  
And all about, packed almost back to back,  
Bent forms and brows, and pallid lips that sigh  
From wretched torture of the daily rack.

— LURANA W. SHELDON in the *N. Y. Times*.

Brander Matthews's *Vignettes of Manhattan* are, as the title implies, primarily descriptive, and the narrative thread that runs through each is not essential. But liter-

<sup>2</sup> For a full consideration of this topic see Gardiner's *Forms of Prose Literature*, pp. 105-113.

ature of this sort is unusual. The principal function of description is to serve as an accessory to other forms of discourse.

Subordinate to narration as description usually is, however, we note, before leaving the consideration of these general relations, that description, for its own greater effectiveness, often takes the narrative form; the details of a scene, instead of being conceived of as mere data of form and space, become instinct with life, engage in action, progress on towards the completion of some occurrence. For example: —

I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning, and my way lay through a part of the town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps. Street after street, and all the folks asleep — street after street, all lighted up as if for a procession and all as empty as a church — till at last I got into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of may be eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It was n't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut. I gave a view halloa, took to my heels, collared my gentleman, and brought him back to where was already quite a group about the screaming child. He was perfectly cool and made no resistance, but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me like running. The people who had turned out were the girl's own family; and pretty soon the doctor, for whom she had been sent, put in an appearance. Well, the child was not much the worse; more frightened, according to the

## 16 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

Sawbones, and there you might have supposed would have been an end to it. But there was one curious circumstance. I had taken a loathing to my gentleman at first sight. So had the child's family, which was only natural. But the doctor's case was what struck me. He was the usual cut-and-dried apothecary, of no particular age and color, with a strong Edinburgh accent, and about as emotional as a bagpipe. Well, sir, he was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner I saw that Sawbones turn sick and white with the desire to kill him.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage it is not difficult to discover two wholly different rhetorical elements: on the one hand, the orderly arrangement of the narrator's experiences in the early morning, the sudden glimpse of the two figures, the collision, the capture, the arrival of the doctor, — all prosaic elements of the typical narrative; on the other hand, the impression left on the reader's imagination — the impression of the hellish brutality that characterized Hyde, that produced loathing and murderous hate in the beholder. Nor can there be any doubt that to create this impression of loathing was Stevenson's ultimate purpose. The episode has no value save as a picture of Hyde, disgusting, loathsome. To make his picture effective, the author elects to cast it into narrative form, but it is in essence description.

Another example of the same principle may be found in the famous chapter in Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, entitled "The Grindstone," where the gruesome picture of blood and frenzy is cast in the form of a detailed incident. Just as Muir found the mood of narration best suited to the clear exposition of how mountain lakes come into being, just as Erskine could make his proof more

<sup>1</sup> Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. By permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.



convincing by throwing it into the form of chronicle, so Dickens, in developing the thought that the scene about the grindstone was a mad orgy of savagery and passion, conceived of the picture as a transaction and arranged the successive details as in narration. In function, therefore, the passage is narrative description.

How different in effect is the plain, straightforward manner of conventional description will appear in passages like the following, in which there is no suggestion of the progress of successive details as in an event: —

There lived in those days round the corner — in Bishopsgate Street Without — one Brogley, sworn broker and appraiser, who kept a shop where every description of second-hand furniture was exhibited in the most uncomfortable aspect, and under circumstances and in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose. Dozens of chairs hooked on to washing-stands, which with difficulty poised themselves on the shoulders of sideboards, which in their turn stood on the wrong side of dining-tables, gymnastic with their legs upward on the tops of other dining-tables, were among its most reasonable arrangements. A banquet array of dish-covers, wine-glasses, and decanters was generally to be seen spread forth upon the bosom of a four-post bedstead, for the entertainment of such genial company as half a dozen pokers and a hall lamp. A set of window curtains, with no windows belonging to them, would be seen gracefully draping a barricade of chests of drawers, loaded with little jars from chemists' shops; while a homeless hearth-rug, severed from its natural companion the fireside, braved the shrewd east wind in its adversity, and trembled in melancholy accord with the shrill complainings of a cabinet piano, wasting away, a string a day, and faintly resounding to the noises of the street in its jangling and distracted brain. Of motionless clocks that never stirred a finger, and seemed as incapable of being successfully wound up as the pecuniary affairs of their former owners, there was always a great choice in Mr. Brogley's shop; and various looking-

## 18 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

glasses, accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and refraction, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin.<sup>1</sup>

### IV. Summary

In summing up these general remarks on narration in its relations to the other forms of prose discourse, it is, perhaps, well to observe that one can overrate the importance of the distinctions between exposition, argumentation, description, and narration. It is not for a moment to be assumed that the great masters of prose deliberate with poised pen whether they are utilizing exposition or argument, whether their word-pictures are simple description or are shaded by the narrative method. Their problem is rather, What is the most effective method of presenting thought? A writer with a vivid power of visualization, a sense of concreteness, will choose to expound a theory or a process by means of a picture or through the medium of a story. Another, whose gifts are of the logical, abstract order, will set forth the same theory or process by orderly, clear, but unimaginative exposition. Yet both will write effectively. An exposition that would be suitable for the *Scientific American* would be out of place in *St. Nicholas*. Means, methods, must yield to ends.

On the other hand, there is sometimes a tendency towards the other extreme; a tendency to argue that these rhetorical distinctions have no ultimate value, that they are mere academic subtleties. This is, in its way, as fallacious as to overestimate their importance. The distinctions between methods are useful largely to the student and to the critic, it is true, but to them they certainly possess practical value. If definite character-

<sup>1</sup> Dickens's *Dombey and Son*.

istic advantages do belong to one form of discourse as compared with another, the student of literature can more judiciously estimate the work of a literary master when he appreciates wherein the master utilizes the rhetorical opportunities that lie open to him. His criticism becomes more truly scientific and not merely a welter of impressions. Distinctions of method are not the mere wire-drawn subtleties of theory.

## CHAPTER II

### ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVE FORM

It is evident from the definition of narration that the main details constituting the occurrence will vary in complexity as the discourse itself varies in length and completeness. The main details of an extended novel, for instance, will be not only more numerous but individually more complex than will those of a brief account like that cited on page 2. And, as the principles of rhetorical structure vary with the complexity of the discourse, we may at this point do well to analyze in some detail the matter of narrative form.

To begin with the simplest complete form of composition, — the sentence, — let us take the following passage from the Book of Acts: —

Now while Peter was much perplexed in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodging there.

The entire occurrence here presented may be entitled "The Arrival of the Messengers at the House of Simon," and the essential parts are: (i) Peter's perplexity; (ii) The arrival of the messengers; and (iii) Their inquiry. Of these (i) is temporally subordinate to (ii) and (iii), which are temporally coördinate with each other. A further analysis would show that in (i) there are two narrative subdivisions: (a) Peter's vision, and (b) his con-

sequent wonder as to its portent; that in (ii) there are three further units: (a) the dispatch of the messengers by Cornelius, (b) their inquiries as to the location of Simon's house, and (c) their arrival at the gate. Or, to represent the respective coördinations and subordinations graphically: —

- I. Peter's perplexity.
  - (a) His vision.
  - (b) His wonder as to its portent.
- II. The arrival of the messengers.
  - (a) Their dispatch by Cornelius.
  - (b) Their inquiries as to Simon's house.
  - (c) Their arrival at his house.
- III. Their inquiries at the door.

In this case the stages indicated by the Roman numerals constitute the particulars that make up the occurrence signified by the title, — particulars represented in the original passage by individual clauses. But sometimes the exigencies of composition may suppress clauses into phrasal form, as illustrated in the following: —

The apostles, when they were returned, declared unto him what things they had done. And he took them, and withdrew apart to a city called Bethsaida. But the multitudes perceiving it followed him: and he welcomed them, and spake to them of the kingdom of God, and them that had need of healing he healed.

Examination of this passage will show seven main details, or units, coördinated into principal clauses (indicated by the principal verbs, *declared*, *took*, *withdrew*, *followed*, *welcomed*, *spake*, and *healed*); three others in subordinated form (indicated in the dependent clauses "when . . . returned," "what . . . done," and "that . . . healing"); and two suppressed into participial

## 22 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

phrase form (*called* and *perceiving*). Of course it would be possible to carry the analysis even farther and to show how the adjectives, adverbs, and other parts of speech are in truth highly condensed predications, in which we can trace ultimate narrative elements. But for practical purposes the examination need go no farther than the complete independent statements, which, therefore, we might term the basis of all narrative discourse. These basal units combine into greater and more complex units, and ultimately take form in narrative episodes, each complete in itself. Beyond that, a number of such episodes may combine in a more extended group, again complete; and these groups in still larger, until we reach a complete narrative form like the novel or the biography.

A good example of the simplest complete form into which the ultimate narrative elements combine is presented in the ordinary paragraph item of the daily paper, as in the following: —

An executive session of the Joint Investigating Committee, authorized to investigate and report on the finances of the city, was held in the Murray Hill Hotel yesterday.

The Mountain Ash male choir, a famous organization of Welsh miners, sailed on the steamer Adriatic to-day for a tour of the United States. They have been invited to sing at the White House.

Football practice began at the University yesterday. About forty candidates responded to Captain Young's call. The team is greatly weakened by the graduation of last year's class.

It is not essential to the item that, as in the cases just cited, it should be limited to a single sentence or to a

brief paragraph, but it is essential that it be complete, and, more than that, that it give the impression of oneness, not allowing the attention to dwell on the corporate, individual character of the constituent parts. The account of Wheeler's death, for example, quoted on page 2, although it is composed of four sentences, is a paragraph item, because we do not dwell on the minor particulars that were pointed out as constituting the details of the narrative. Rather we think of the engineer's tragic death, — a central thought, — and the various details merge into the one idea. If, on the other hand, the writer had introduced the occurrence with an account of how Wheeler had for days been filled with the sense of impending disaster and how his departure from home on the fatal morning had presented a dramatic scene; if the account had contained a paragraph descriptive of the prostration of Wheeler's wife when friends brought home the news of her husband's death; — then the story would have lost the corporate unity that now characterizes it. Instead of our thinking of the simple clause elements, we should think of the larger group units: the engineer's apprehension; his farewell; his death; the breaking of the news. Narrative of this latter character, in which we are conscious of the somewhat obtrusive unity of the individual particulars of the occurrence, is known as "episodic discourse." The border line between episodic narrative and the isolated narrative item is not clearly defined. One reader will rapidly group the details into a single tableau and lose sight of the parts in the completeness of the whole. Another, more analytical in temper, will dwell upon these very parts and see each in its entirety.

Narrative of the episodic order has already been illustrated by the analysis of Maupassant's *Necklace* on

page 3. Further analysis would, of course, show that the story, like the passage from the Book of Acts, is composed of ultimate narrative units phrased as simple clauses; but these are not the natural constituent parts into which the story falls. We think of it rather under the seven groups indicated by the sections into which the story has been divided. The minute divisions are lost in the larger group units.

The nature of episodic narrative may well be illustrated by the Parable of the Prodigal Son as contained in the Gospel of Saint Luke, especially if we arrange the paragraphs and general grouping in accordance with modern usage, as follows: —

### THE PRODIGAL SON

#### *I. The Apportionment of the Property*

A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me."

And he divided unto them his living.

#### *II. The Mis-spent Life*

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country; and there he wasted his substance with riotous living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have been filled with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

But when he came to himself he said, "How many servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will



say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.'"

And he arose, and came to his father.

### *III. The Return*

But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And the son said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

And they began to be merry.

### *IV. The Enmity of the Elder Brother*

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called to him one of the servants, and inquired what these things might be.

And he said unto him, "Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

But he was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and intreated him.

But he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but when this thy son came, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf."

And he said unto him, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all

that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

In the story as thus arranged we find four principal narrative units, constituting the occurrence. Each of these, in turn, consists of well differentiated sub-groups, indicated by the paragraph division: for example, in the second main section we have (a) the departure of the young man; (b) the loss of his fortune; (c) his repentance and resolve; and (d) his setting out for home. Each of these sub-groups also is capable of final analysis into the narrative elements of the simplest form, the sentence and clause units as already shown in the other instances. But when we compare these four main divisions or their respective subdivisions with the various items enumerated on page 22, we find a rather noteworthy difference: chapter I of the parable, for example, is incomplete without chapters II and III and IV, and each of these in turn is valuable only when, taken in conjunction with the others, it forms part of the parable as a whole. So, again, with the sub-divisions (a), (b), (c), etc., each one, while in a sense complete, is but a step in the development of a larger whole, the chapter to which it belongs. It is here that we find the essential character of episodic narration: an episode is a complete entity, indeed, but in its completeness it forms an essential part of some greater unit, which may or may not be ultimate and final.

In extended narrative literature, the principal episodic unit is generally the basis of the chapter division, or sometimes of so-called "books" such as are found in Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, where the story is narrated under the three heads: I. Recalled to Life;

II. The Golden Thread; and III. The Track of a Storm. I contains six chapters, each a complete stage; II contains twenty-four; and III fifteen.

Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is another case in point. This story the author has divided into seven main stages, which he calls "phases," the episodic character of each appearing from its respective title: —

Phase the first.....	The Maiden.
Phase the second.....	Maiden no More.
Phase the third.....	The Rally.
Phase the fourth.....	The Consequence.
Phase the fifth.....	The Woman Pays.
Phase the sixth.....	The Convert.
Phase the seventh.....	Fulfilment.

Each of these "phases" is again subdivided into chapters, in this case without titles, but truly episodic, as is clear if one looks into their content. The first five, for example, in Phase the first, might perhaps be represented by some such topics as these: —

- I. Seed by the Wayside.
- II. The Club Revel.
- III. The Close of the Day.
- IV. Rolliver's.
- V. An Early Morning Tragedy.

This principle of episodic division and subdivision characterizes other forms of narrative writing as well as the novel — history, biography, etc., as will be apparent from a glance at the table of contents often prefixed to the various chapters.

For mechanical purposes, in analyzing examples of episodic composition into their constituent parts, the student will find it convenient to classify the main

## 28 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

groups as "primary," or episodes of the first order; their respective subdivisions as "secondary," or episodes of the second order; and so on, until he reaches the final elements. According to this classification the analysis of the Prodigal Son as arranged on pages 24-26 would show four episodes of the first order (indicated I, II, III, and IV); in II four episodes of the second order (indicated by a, b, c, and d); and in d of these subgroups two ultimate details of the third order.

## CHAPTER III

### GENERAL RHETORICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATIVE FORMS

#### A. THE NARRATIVE ITEM

THE rhetorical qualities of unity, emphasis, and coherence will vary somewhat in their application to the item type and the episodic type of narrative discourse. This difference arises from the fact that, sufficient to itself and not a part of a greater whole, the item does not possess what may be called the "external relations" that characterize the episode. Hence rhetorical principles become simpler in their application, identical with those of what has been called the "isolated paragraph" in distinction from the "related paragraph" of connected discourse, and modified only by such considerations as arise from the very nature of narration as shown by the definition of that form of discourse.

##### (1) Unity

The general character of the unity that characterizes the isolated narrative item has already been briefly discussed on pages 4-5. The corporate nature of the event, of the transaction, must be carefully maintained; the contributive bearing of the constituent parts on the entire topic must be made evident. If the reader's mind is allowed to dwell upon the individual character of these constituent details, the impression of one-ness is lost, and either the narrative becomes increasingly episodic,

## 30 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

as the details are more and more individualized, or else, through the introduction of irrelevant matter, concentration upon the central theme is weakened with consequent loss of effect. For example, in the following item, by the introduction of a wholly irrelevant detail the sense of concentrated directness is lost. The full effect of the paragraph becomes more apparent if the detail in question be omitted and the narrative be allowed to proceed without interruption.

The wretched spy, Veslovsky, received annually 100,000 francs (\$20,000) from the Russian Government. *He was a short, fat man, with long unkempt hair.* He associated with us, and we believed in him. From the first day he came among us this wonderful plotter, this genial schemer, sold his brethren, and betrayed women into the hands of jailers and hangmen. He incited us to acts of violence, in the interest of the Government.<sup>1</sup>

In President Roosevelt's tribute to Lincoln in the speech delivered at Hodgenville, Ky., on the centenary of Lincoln's birth, the unity of the following paragraph — which may be isolated as if in itself a complete item — is apparent throughout. Every detail contributes to the ultimate conception of Lincoln's career as the painful struggle of an earnest personality toward the goal of supreme attainment. The central idea is not interrupted by the interjection of anything that does not bear on the core idea; the unity of the "transaction" is apparent.

This rail-splitter, this boy who passed his ungainly youth in the dire poverty of the poorest of the frontier folk, whose rise was by weary and painful labor, lived to lead his people through the burning flames of a struggle from which the nation

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Digest*: vol. xxxviii, p. 287.

emerged, purified as by fire, born anew to a loftier life. After long years of iron effort, and of failure that came more often than victory, he at last rose to the leadership of the Republic, at the moment when that leadership had become the stupendous world-task of the time. He grew to know greatness, but never ease. Success came to him, but never happiness, save that which springs from doing well a painful and a vital task. Power was his, but not pleasure. The furrows deepened on his brow, but his eyes were undimmed by either hate or fear. His gaunt shoulders were bowed, but his steel thews never faltered as he bore for a burden the destinies of his people. His great and tender heart shrank from giving pain; and the task allotted him was to pour out like water the life-blood of the young men, and to feel in his every fibre the sorrow of the women. Disaster saddened but never dismayed him. As the red years of war went by they found him ever doing his duty in the present, ever facing the future with fearless front, high of heart, and dauntless of soul. Unbroken by hatred, unshaken by scorn, he worked and suffered for the people. Triumph was his at the last; and barely had he tasted it before murder found him, and those kindly, patient, fearless eyes were closed forever.

## (2) Emphasis

In the narrative item, as in the ordinary isolated paragraph, emphasis, or effectiveness, is secured by so massing the details as to bring out definitely and vividly the fundamental occurrence. This is often accomplished by the conventional rhetorical device of placing the most significant matter in those parts of the discourse best suited to attract and hold the reader's attention — the beginning or the end, preferably the end. A narrative item that closes with unimportant data is weak indeed. In many instances there may be no particular detail of relatively great importance save the climax of

the narrative, which rounds out and completes the account, and the ordering of the details so as to produce this cumulative effect belongs to coherence rather than to emphasis. But often, especially when narration combines with exposition, there is opportunity of observing the principle of effective massing. The narrative form, in such cases, is chosen for the elucidation of some truth, and the effectiveness of the composition depends upon the emphatic presentation of this cardinal idea. For example, in the following paragraph from Green's *Short History of the English People* — which, for the purposes of the immediate discussion, we may view as a complete unit — the thought of especial value is the resolute character of Henry II. as underlying a policy that prepared England for future unity and freedom. It will be noted that this central theme is brought to the reader's attention at the very outset and is left with him at the close.

Young as he was, Henry mounted the throne with a resolute purpose of government which his reign carried steadily out. His practical, serviceable frame suited the hardest worker of his time. There was something in his build and look, in the square, stout frame, the fiery face, the close-cropped hair, the prominent eyes, the bull neck, the coarse strong hands, the bowed legs, that marked out the keen, stirring, coarse-fibred man of business. "He never sits down," said one who observed him closely; "he is always on his legs from morning to night." Orderly in business, careless in appearance, sparing in diet, never resting or giving his servants rest, chatty, inquisitive, endowed with a singular charm of address and strength of memory, obstinate in love or hatred, a fair scholar, a great hunter, his general air that of a rough, passionate, busy man, Henry's personal character told directly on the character of his reign. His accession marks the period of amalgamation, when neighborhood and traffic and intermarriage drew Englishmen and Normans rapidly into a single people. A national feeling



was thus springing up before which the barriers of the older feudalism were to be swept away. Henry had even less reverence for the feudal past than the men of his day; he was indeed utterly without the imagination and reverence which enable men to sympathize with any past at all. He had a practical man's impatience of the obstacles thrown in the way of his reforms by the older constitution of the realm, nor could he understand other men's reluctance to purchase undoubted improvements by the sacrifice of customs and traditions of by-gone days. Without any theoretical hostility to the co-ordinate powers of the state, it seemed to him a perfectly reasonable and natural course to trample either baronage or Church under foot to gain his end of good government. He saw clearly that the remedy for such anarchy as England had endured under Stephen lay in the establishment of a kingly government unembarrassed by any privileges of order or class, administered by royal servants, and in whose public administration the nobles acted simply as delegates of the sovereign. His work was to lie in the organization of judicial and administrative reforms which realized this idea. But of the great currents of thought and feeling which were tending in the same direction he knew nothing. What he did for the moral and social impulses which were telling on men about him was simply to let them alone. Religion grew more and more identified with patriotism under the eyes of a King who whispered, and scribbled, and looked at picture-books during mass, who never confessed, and cursed God in wild frenzies of blasphemy. Great peoples formed themselves on both sides of the sea round a sovereign who bent the whole force of his mind to hold together an Empire which the growth of nationality must inevitably destroy. There is throughout a tragic grandeur in the irony of Henry's position, that of a Sforza of the fifteenth century set in the midst of the twelfth, building up by patience and policy and craft a dominion alien to the deepest sympathies of his age, and fated to be swept away in the end by popular forces to whose existence his very cleverness and activity blinded him. But indirectly and unconsciously, his policy did more

## 34 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

than that of all his predecessors to prepare England for the unity and freedom which the fall of his house was to reveal.<sup>1</sup>

The passage does not indeed carry out the rather theoretical principle laid down by Professor Barrett Wendell in his *English Composition* that the effective massing of a paragraph may be tested by our ability to summarize its substance in a simple sentence of which the subject is the opening sentence of the paragraph and the predicate the last; but it approximates even this extreme test. We might perhaps say that the substantial thought of the passage from Green runs somewhat after this order: The resolute purpose displayed by the young king at his accession, and steadily carried out through his reign, was largely instrumental in preparing England for her future unity and freedom. The brief narrative *résumé* contained in the body of the paragraph is entirely subordinate to this main consideration, which is driven home by its emphatic position at the beginning and at the end of the passage.

Macaulay's famous account of the Black Hole horror, as contained in the Essay on Lord Clive, is an example of the more typical brief narrative. It may be considered as an enlarged narrative item of three paragraphs in length.

Then was committed that great crime, memorable for its singular atrocity, memorable for the tremendous retribution by which it was followed. The English captives were left at the mercy of the guards, and the guards determined to secure them for the night in the prison of the garrison, a chamber known by the fearful name of the Black Hole. Even for a single European malefactor that dungeon would, in such a climate,

<sup>1</sup> From Green's *Short History of the English People*. Published by Harper & Brothers.

have been too close and narrow. The space was only twenty feet square. The air-holes were small and obstructed. It was the summer solstice, the season when the fierce heat of Bengal can scarcely be rendered tolerable to natives of England by lofty halls and by the constant waving of fans. The number of the prisoners was one hundred and forty-six. When they were ordered to enter the cell, they imagined that the soldiers were joking; and, being in high spirits on account of the promise of the Nabob to spare their lives, they laughed and jested at the absurdity of the notion. They soon discovered their mistake. They expostulated; they entreated; but in vain. The guards threatened to cut down all who hesitated. The captives were driven into the cell at the point of the sword, and the door was instantly shut and locked upon them.

Nothing in history or fiction, not even the story which Ugolino told in the sea of everlasting ice, after he had wiped his bloody lips on the scalp of his murderer, approaches the horrors which were recounted by the few survivors of that night. They cried for mercy. They strove to burst the door. Holwell, who, even in that extremity, retained some presence of mind, offered large bribes to the jailers. But the answer was that nothing could be done without the Nabob's orders, that the Nabob was asleep, and that he would be angry if anybody woke him. Then the prisoners went mad with despair. They trampled each other down, fought for the places at the windows, fought for the pittance of water with which the cruel mercy of the murderers mocked their agonies, raved, prayed, blasphemed, implored the guards to fire among them. The jailers in the meantime held lights to the bars, and shouted with laughter at the frantic struggles of their victims. At length the tumult died away in low gaspings and moanings. The day broke. The Nabob had slept off his debauch, and permitted the door to be opened. But it was some time before the soldiers could make a lane for the survivors, by piling up on each side the heaps of corpses on which the burning climate had already begun to do its loathsome work. When at length a passage was made, twenty-three ghastly figures, such as their own mothers

would not have known, staggered one by one out of the charnel-house. A pit was instantly dug. The dead bodies, a hundred and twenty-three in number, were flung into it promiscuously, and covered up.

But these things, which, after the lapse of more than eighty years, cannot be told or read without horror, awakened neither remorse nor pity in the bosom of the savage Nabob. He inflicted no punishment on the murderers. He showed no tenderness to the survivors. Some of them, indeed, from whom nothing was to be got were suffered to depart; but those from whom it was thought that anything could be extorted were treated with execrable cruelty. Holwell, unable to walk, was carried before the tyrant, who reproached him, threatened him, and sent him up to the country in irons, together with some other gentlemen who were suspected of knowing more than they chose to tell about the treasures of the Company. These persons, still bowed down by the sufferings of that great agony, were lodged in miserable sheds and fed only with grain and water, till at length the intercessions of the female relations of the Nabob procured their release. One English-woman had survived that night. She was placed in the harem of the Prince at Moorshedabad.

The student will notice the dramatic effect of the sentences that close these respective paragraphs: "The captives were driven into the cell at the point of the sword, and the door was instantly shut and locked upon them," "The dead bodies, a hundred and twenty-three in number, were flung into it promiscuously, and covered up," and "She was placed in the harem of the Prince at Moorshedabad." Each division of the narrative concludes forcefully, leaving a distinct impression of horror. The paragraphs are well massed.

Another consideration that belongs to this same rhetorical element of emphasis is the proportionate amount of space that each detail should receive. In the item there

is not so great likelihood of the writer's over-elaborating the introduction or of dwelling unduly upon insignificant details; that is a graver danger in episodic narrative. But even in the brief form of the item some one constituent portion may be unduly emphasized with the result that attention is drawn away from the main theme with consequent loss of emphasis. This consideration will be taken up at greater length when we come to discuss the elaboration of episodes in more extended narrative discourse.

### (3) Coherence

While unity and emphasis are important elements in the construction of the narrative item, while without them it lacks artistic finish, yet coherence is, all things considered, the very warp of the narrative pattern. As stated in the definition, narration is not merely the presentation of an occurrence; it is the setting forth of the details of the occurrence in their chronological order. The idea of a series, of a succession, is fundamental. With this chronological *ordering* of the details coherence has mainly to do. In description the totality of effect, the unity of impression, is the main consideration; and, although in securing and assuring the impression the artist may not neglect the details of arrangement that combine to produce the ultimate harmony of parts, yet this harmony is in the end his main consideration. The arrangement of the details is but a means to that end. With the historian, however, the sequence of the details is relatively of greater importance. As the narrative form increases in complexity, this question of coherence increases in importance, as will appear if one thinks of the part that the details must play, for example, in a novel of complicated plot, or in a detective story. But

even in the item and in the isolated narrative paragraph, the sequence of the details plays a far more important part than in a paragraph of any other character.

As already intimated, the question of narrative coherence brings up the consideration of plot; but in the simple item this may well seem too pretentious a title. Within the limits of the item there is little opportunity for the elaboration and intricacy that belong to plot as that term is generally understood. And yet, even in the simple narrative, the ordering of details presents material for study. What arrangement will best set the event before the reader's mind, — the actual order of the details as they happened, or the issue followed by the successive steps that led up to it? Shall we insert the connectives, temporal and logical, and thus lead the reader from point to point, allowing his imagination or his logical sense no rein whatever? Or, by the omission of these auxiliary guides, shall we give him the liberty to supply the links and thus allow him, to some small extent, to construct his own pattern as he reads? These and other considerations of like sort confront the student of narrative structure as he examines the element of coherence. The various aspects of the subject may be arranged under the following heads: (a) the structure and ordering of the sentences; and (b) the ordering of the component narrative details.

#### (a) *The Structure and Ordering of the Sentences*

In considering the structure and ordering of the sentences in a piece of composition, a matter of first importance is the use of connectives. De Quincey, speaking in general of style,<sup>1</sup> says that "the philosophy of transi-

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography and Literary Reminiscences.*

tion and connection, or the art by which one step in an evolution of thought is made to arise out of another, is one of the two capital secrets in the art of prose composition: all fluent and effective composition depends on the connectives." This is perhaps truer of expository or argumentative writing than of narrative, because in them the logical relations are more varied in character and more subtle. Unless the reader be restricted by the causal, conditional, temporal, or concessive connectives, there is greater opportunity for him to go astray into some by-path not foreseen by the writer. In narrative writing, on the other hand, the relation between the constituent ideas is largely temporal, and the suppression or the expression of the connectives becomes a matter of effectiveness, rather than of mere clearness.

*Asyndeton* is the name given to that figure of style in which the connectives between the various parts of sentences or between sentences themselves are omitted. *Asyndeton* may be considered as a rhetorical device to secure emphasis, and, being a device, is a deviation from the normal method of writing, in which we express the connectives. We may, therefore, logically consider first those forms of the narrative paragraph in which the transitions appear.

An example of the simplest kind of narrative sequence in which we find all the connectives is offered in the story of Joseph's coat (Genesis xxxvii, 29-36), which we may extract from its setting and consider as a simple narrative item.

And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats,

*Col.*

and dipped the coat in the blood; and they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

In this passage all the main narrative details are joined by "and," except in one case where the adversative idea is represented by "but," and in another where "thus," expressing a modal relation with something of summarizing effect, joins the sentence to what precedes. Simplicity is the noteworthy characteristic of the style: the narrative details merely accumulate without suggestion of complication. According to modern usage, where the tendency of written prose is toward the abruptness of conversational style, this fully conjoined method would be open to the charge of monotony and immaturity. The type is familiar to all critics of undergraduate composition.

Compare with the simplicity of the scriptural narrative the following account chosen from Scott's *Highland Widow*: —

Whilst the women thus discoursed together, as they watched the corpse of Allan Breack Cameron, the unhappy cause of his death pursued her lonely way across the mountain. While she remained within sight of the bothy, she put a strong constraint on herself, that by no alteration of pace or gesture, she might afford to her enemies the triumph of calculating the excess of

(17)



her mental agitation, nay, despair. She stalked, therefore, with a slow rather than a swift step, and, holding herself upright, seemed at once to endure with firmness that woe which was passed, and bid defiance to that which was about to come. But when she was beyond the sight of those who remained in the hut, she could no longer suppress the extremity of her agitation. Drawing her mantle wildly round her, she stopped at the first knoll, and climbing to its summit, extended her arms up to the bright moon, as if accusing heaven and earth for her misfortunes, and uttered scream on scream, like those of an eagle whose nest has been plundered of her brood. Awhile she vented her grief in these inarticulate cries, then rushed on her way with a hasty and unequal step, in the vain hope of overtaking the party which was conveying her son a prisoner to Dumbarton. But her strength, superhuman as it seemed, failed her in the trial, nor was it possible for her, with her utmost efforts, to accomplish her purpose.

Here we have a distinctly different effect. In this paragraph the connectives are as generously expressed as in the passage regarding Joseph's coat, but with far greater variety. We have in the passage from Scott not only the idea of chronological sequence, but also of simultaneous, of consequent, and of contrasting action as well. Compared with the extract from the Old Testament this presents greater complexity of structure; in fact, it reveals an approximation towards plot.

In contrast to the leisurely and fully detailed method of the preceding articulated paragraphs we may take the following incident from chapter xviii of Macaulay's *History of England*:—

Glenlyon and his men committed the error of despatching their hosts with firearms instead of using the cold steel. The peal and flash of gun after gun gave notice, from three different parts of the valley at once, that murder was doing. From fifty

col.

cottages the half-naked peasantry fled under cover of the night to the recesses of their pathless glen. Even the sons of MacIan, who had been especially marked out for destruction, contrived to escape. They were roused from sleep by faithful servants. John, who, by the death of his father, had become the patriarch of the tribe, quitted his dwelling just as twenty soldiers with fixed bayonets marched up to it. It was broad day long before Hamilton arrived. He found the work not even half performed. About thirty corpses lay wallowing in blood on the dunghills before the doors. One or two women were seen among the number, and a yet more fearful and piteous sight, a little hand, which had been lopped in the tumult of the butchery from some infant. One aged Macdonald was found alive. He was probably too infirm to fly, and, as he was above seventy, was not included in the orders under which Glenlyon had acted. Hamilton murdered the old man in cold blood. The deserted hamlets were then set on fire; and the troops departed, driving away with them many sheep and goats, nine hundred kine, and two hundred of the small shaggy ponies of the Highlands.

Here every sentence-articulation is suppressed. The reader no longer moves on step by step; he leaps from detail to detail. Between each sentence and its successor there is a distinct gap, but no conjunctive or adverbial bridge spans the chasm. The result is far greater animation and force. If continued too far, this device, like that of a fully articulated style, loses through sheer monotony, but the monotony now results in weariness from sustained mental exertion, from too long a run. In the other case the monotony did not weary so much as it cloyed. The device of asyndeton in the item, as in longer narrative, is adapted to a theme of vigor, rapidity, dash. It secures force and nervous energy, but is easily carried too far.

The matter of coherence, however, is not limited to the considerations of initial and terminal connectives: coherence is affected also by internal articulation. The temporal relation that enters so essentially into the narrative item can be expressed in a variety of ways, each possessing its own particular shade of significance, and the general character of the whole is attributable in no small degree to the type of structure selected. A very simple illustration will show what is meant by the value of internal connectives. Consider the single sentence:

So artfully did he prepare the road for his favorable reception at the court of this prince that he was at once and universally welcomed as a benefactor.<sup>1</sup>

As it stands, this sentence conveys but a single principal idea, composed of two essential parts, standing to each other in the relation of cause and effect. Disturb the relation inherent in "so" and "that," and the highly coherent aspect of this complex idea is lost. The sentence at once falls apart into two independent units, the bond between them being no longer clearly expressed but left to the interpretation of the reader; for example,

He artfully prepared the road for his favorable reception at the court of this prince; and he was at once and universally welcomed as a benefactor.

The relation that is indicated at the semicolon might be, — probably would be, — interpreted as that of cause and effect, and yet it might well be the mere sequence of chronological succession, — a very different idea. If, now, the sentence were to read: —

Although he artfully prepared the road for his favorable reception at the court of this prince, yet he was at once and universally welcomed as a benefactor,

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey: *Revolt of the Tartars*.

it at once becomes evident that the logical values have been radically changed, and the reader must adjust his mind to a wholly different context. The successive variations show that within the sentence coherence-words are of great importance in exactly expressing the idea existent in the mind of the writer.

Not to go too deeply into the mechanics of the sentence, — the clause, the phrase, and the various classes of modifiers, — it may be said that in general the effects of connective expression and suppression are the same within as between sentences. A narrative item constructed of sentences in which there is but a succession of coördinated clauses, similar in structure and cumulative in character, will be marked by simplicity, but often at the risk of monotony. Greater complexity, more careful regard to coherence of details, as shown by the subordination of one idea to another, not only presents the narrative theme with greater exactness, but, by throwing the stress where it logically belongs, approximates in a very rudimentary way the complexity of well grouped plot structure. In other words, due attention to coherence within the sentence contributes also to clearness and emphasis. For example, to cite a single sentence in illustration of a principle that in its extension characterizes the entire item, take the following:—

That dread voice of his that shook the hills when he was angry, fell in ordinary talk very pleasantly upon the ear, with a kind of honied, friendly whine, not far off singing, that was eminently Scottish.<sup>1</sup>

Now if one were to recast this sentence into the form that frequently is found in the work of the thoughtless or

<sup>1</sup> Stevenson's *Memories and Portraits*. By permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

inexperienced writer, suppressing all the shades of interdependence, and giving to each constituent predication equal stress, the result would be something after this sort:

Sometimes he was angry and that dread voice of his shook the hills, but in ordinary talk it fell very pleasantly upon the ear, and its kind of honied, friendly whine was not far off singing and was eminently Scottish.

It is apparent at a glance that the due proportion of parts has been grossly disturbed. The pleasant tone of the voice in ordinary conversation, which is the dominant theme of the original sentence, has now lost its relative value by its correlation with the idea of the first clause and of the last two, all of which are logically subordinate and contributory.

These and other matters of internal sentence structure, — the periodic, the loose, and the balanced sentence; the suppression of clauses into phrases; simple, complex, and compound sentences; the matter of phrasal modifications, — have been thrashed out in every text book on rhetoric and composition. Nor are these somewhat technical considerations trivial and merely academic. The student of the mechanics of narrative writing may well study them, for the observation of these very details, conscious or unconscious, has contributed largely to the effectiveness that characterizes the expression of the great masters. Narrative literature abounds with examples that illustrate the difference between styles characterized by simplicity or complexity, clearness or vagueness, rapidity or deliberation, dignity or informality. And often it is evident that the ultimate effect is due largely to the writer's observation of coherence between the sentences or between the elements within the sentences.

(b) *The Ordering of the Narrative Details*

Coherence in the narrative item, however, is not limited to the coördination and subordination of sentences or of sentence elements. The ordering of the narrative details that constitute the occurrence is of no less importance. This consideration is less purely technical and grammatical than the preceding; it appeals more to the artistic judgment of the writer, to his sense of effectiveness.

The writer of the simplest narrative form may order his details in any one of several ways. Three, however, are common, and each of the three has its own particular value.

One method of ordering the narrative elements is illustrated in the following item, the brief review of a novel:

*Child of Destiny* (William Briggs, Toronto) by William J. Fischer, is a love story dealing with two generations. A young man is scorned by the woman he loves, and, giving himself up to jealousy and hatred, follows her after her marriage to another man and kidnaps her little daughter. He carries the child back to his own home and brings her up in luxury. She grows into a lovely young woman and is about to marry, when a letter of confession left by her abductor at the time of his death reveals that she and her intended husband are brother and sister. Later it is discovered that they are not blood relatives, since he had been adopted by her parents.<sup>1</sup>

In this case we have what we may perhaps call the normal narrative order. The details are set down in simple chronological succession. Coherence is secured by the natural bond that unites events proceeding one from another. The writer assumes sufficient interest on the part

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*.

of the reader to hold the attention from one stage to another until the end, without the adventitious assistance of complicated structure, such as characterizes a story like James Lane Allen's *Flute and Violin* or a novel like *Henry Esmond*, where the natural order is frequently interrupted by forward casts and subsequent resumptions of the narrative thread.

Another method of ordering the narrative details — a modification of that already explained — appears in the newspaper item following: —

Russell H. Davidson and his wife and infant child had a narrow escape from a most serious accident at Harrison Saturday afternoon, their horse being attacked with blind staggers and falling over a 20-foot embankment into the river near the junction of Main and Park streets. Mr. Davidson was driving his bay mare through the narrow street from Water to Park street, and at the narrowest part the horse was suddenly attacked with a rush of blood to the head, reared, and then fell against the railing protecting the roadway from the embankment by the side of the river. The animal, instantly uncontrollable, fell against the rail, broke it, and then plunged twenty feet down into the stream, which at this point was not very deep. A part of the harness broke, and the runner struck against a stone pier holding up the rail, which prevented the sleigh from plunging with the occupants after the horse.

Harry Templeton, driver for the American Express Company, with the team that he was driving, was just about to pass Mr. Davidson's sleigh. He saw the accident, and, instantly realizing the danger, sprang from his own sleigh, and threw his weight on the cutter, which was toppling on the edge of the embankment. The horse was afterward rescued by John Dennis, who was lowered down to the river by a rope, and led the animal, apparently uninjured, up the bed of the river to a point where the bank sloped sufficiently to afford a firm footing. No bones were broken, and the horse, to all outward appearances, was uninjured.

Here the writer has begun with a bird's-eye view of the complete transaction, and has followed it up by presenting the constituent details in their due order. This method of securing coherence by placing at the very beginning an epitome of the entire action serves the same purpose as do the headlines in a telegraphic column. It gives the hasty reader an opportunity of testing the contents of the paragraph in question, that he may continue or stray elsewhere as his taste dictates. Of course, it is apparent that in this method of ordering the details there must be a momentary break in the coherence of the narrative at the point where the writer completes the epitome and passes on to the individual elements of the account in their chronological order. But, the entire transaction in miniature before him, the chasm is not a wide one, and the effect of coherence is not lost. This device is better adapted to the item than to longer narrative forms, because in these the question of suspense and the various devices for sustaining the reader's interest become increasingly important, and to begin by presenting the issue would be fatal. If one will try to imagine Aldrich's *Marjorie Daw* or Maupassant's *Necklace* so rearranged that the substance of the closing paragraph is summed up at the outset, he will at once appreciate the futility of this method in a long narrative where the interest is to be sustained.

Finally, the writer of simple narrative may vary the natural method, not by epitomizing at the outset, but by plunging *in medias res*, as Virgil does in the story of Æneas or Thackeray in the adventures of Henry Esmond, picking up later the omitted antecedent strands, and working down to the starting point, there to resume the broken narrative. A crude example of the method may be found in the following extract from a daily paper:



"Now, would n't that destroy your confidence in human nature?" exclaimed William Bourne, the chairman of the Board of Selectmen, when a jury rendered a verdict against him in the Municipal Court at Wakefield. "To go to the trouble and expense of defending a perfectly clear case and then to get this sort of treatment!"

Mr. Bourne, who owns a fine estate at Clarksburg, was sued by Duncan Williams, a Clarksburg grain-dealer, for \$195, the value of corn, hay, and oats delivered at Mr. Bourne's residence, and there fed to the horses, chickens, and pigeons. Mr. Bourne declined to pay the bill, contending that he had not ordered the goods.

"I'll sue you," warned Williams.

"Go on and sue," advised Mr. Bourne. "I think my property is worth the face of the bill if you get a judgment."

Williams thought so too, and decided to take the risk. The trial, several times deferred, was held yesterday before Justice Hart, and a jury of six men. Williams won his case.

This device, like the preceding, has the advantage over the prosaic chronological method in that it catches the attention at the outset. The problem is then to carry the reader over the gap that necessarily occurs at the point of reversion to the antecedent particulars. If sufficient momentum can be gained, the reader will follow the backward cast to what may be a prosaic set of initiative details, and will then trace the successive events to the final issue. The method is evidently adapted to those narratives in which the introductory details are not of sufficient dramatic power or interest to catch the attention. In longer composition than the item this same device is effective when the writer wishes to weave into the account minute or numerous data which, if placed at the beginning, would fail to hold the reader, whose interest is as yet unstirred. *Flute and Violin* or *Henry Esmond*, already cited, are instances of the ef-

fective use of this variation from the conventional narrative order. It is apparent that in this, as in the second method, the thread of uninterrupted coherence is distinctly broken, but here, too, success is dependent upon so arousing the reader's curiosity that he will take unconsciously the leap from the intermediate to the initial details of the transaction.

## B. EPISODIC NARRATION

### (1) Unity

*plot* The rhetorical considerations that underlie episodic narration are but an enlargement of those already discussed in relation to the item, because of the broader external relations that enter into the question. To the writer of episodic narration the immediate subject in hand is not sufficient; he must keep constantly before him the larger theme of which his episode forms but a part. Each event must be chronicled with constant thought of its relations to the whole. Delicate matters like "central theme," "consistent point of view," "consistency of treatment," "unity of general effect," enter materially into the problem. This is a broader unity than that of the item, in which perhaps the most important consideration is that there shall be no digression from the item-topic.

The writer of history,—which is, of course, highly episodic narration,—in order to secure unity of impression, must select some central, dominant theme to which all parts shall contribute. The logical relations of cause and effect (see p. 4) will be important elements and will show, it may be, how the various episodes result in great historical events or produce eminent historical characters. The French Revolution, for example, will

not stand out in the midst of embracing narrative environment, complete in itself, but the account of that great convulsion will be presented with constant contemplation of the events that contributed to it, and of those that resulted from it. The account of a great life will be constructed in the constant light of early influences, of environment, of growing character. In each case all the episodes will combine to form one consistent, homogeneous whole. Clearly, it is easier and more practicable to accomplish this in a biography or in a limited field than in a complete history of a people. Hence, writers of history, feeling the unity of individual episodes, often elect to write upon "periods" rather than to attempt the broader themes. Thus we have Macaulay's *History of England from the Accession of James II. to William III.*, Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Freeman's *History of the Norman Conquest*, Froude's *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Armada*. Nor is it surprising that in those greater histories that cover the entire field, like Green's *Short History of the English People* or Hume's *History of England* or Grote's *History of Greece*, one feels to some extent the unity of the various episodes. They seem indeed "a collection of the histories of the several epochs in one aggregation rather than a separate history by itself." Yet even in these more extended "aggregations," as well as in the more restricted themes first mentioned, we are aware of a distinct unity of treatment resulting from the attitude of the writer to his subject. Throughout the historic work of Gibbon, for instance, the critic detects what Saintsbury has termed "an attitude of belittlement towards Christianity in particular, though not much more to Christianity than to all forms of 'enthusiastic religion.'"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Short History of English Literature*: Saintsbury.

In Hume a skeptical attitude toward religion is manifest in his expository as well as in his narrative writing, and in Carlyle a wonderful power of visualizing with dramatic energy the scenes and the personages moves through the pages. The necessity of observing these phases of rhetorical unity renders historic narration a most difficult and highly artistic form of prose composition.

In fiction there is the same necessity for a broad unity. Whether in the short-story or in the complete novel, there is always the dominating theme, which in the original definition we called the "event," the "occurrence," the "transaction." The title will sometimes afford a hint as to this essential core, or nucleus; as in Maupassant's *Happiness*, in Edward Everett Hale's *My Double and How He Undid Me*, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, or in Margaret Deland's *Awakening of Helena Ritchie*. But whether this central theme is revealed in the title or not, the consciousness of it gives unity to the complete composition. Nor is this all. As in historic narration, so in fiction, the *manner* of treatment serves the same end. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for example, the reader is never allowed to forget Hardy's attitude of protest against the existing order, his underlying assumption that this is a God-forgotten world. A far different sentiment pervades *Adam Bede*, a story dealing with much the same theme as *Tess*. One narrative is dark; the other, bright. *Tess* is a cry of despair; *Adam Bede* shows a ray of hope. Dickens wrote in his own peculiar atmosphere of optimism; Thackeray, in one of satire. In the field of the short-story the lurid imagination and the morbidness of Poe give distinct consistency of tone to *The Fall of the House of Usher*; and the idealism of Hawthorne is equally apparent in *The Great Stone Face*.

A story of Kipling's, like *The Man Who Would be King*, is not likely to be attributed to Gilbert Parker: each has a consistent individuality of its own, resulting in what we call unity of tone.

This peculiar atmosphere of one-ness, characteristic of episodic narrative composition, may be easily distinguished in Hewlett's *Miracle of the Peach Tree* (from *The Madonna of the Peach Tree* in *Little Novels of Italy*).<sup>1</sup> In this brief selection the leading episodes are (1) With the herd-boys outside Porta San Zeno; (2) The sudden apparition of the lady; (3) Don Gasparo's interpretation of the mystery; and (4) The consecration of the relic. These episodes individually and collectively are unified by the sense of something quite unearthly, by the air of pervading superstition, and by the rustic simplicity of the actors. The wonderful star-shine, the mysterious sounds of the summer night, the ghostly approach and departure of the lady, the breathless suspense and half-hearted courage of the little herd-boys, the ready credulity of the parish priest and his ruffling into town with the news of the miraculous vision, — all these details unite to give the composition as a whole a congruous and consistent spirit that in large degree determines its literary value.

## (2) Emphasis

We have shown that in the narrative item emphasis is largely a matter of arrangement for effectively bringing out the cardinal idea, and that it is limited, in great degree, to the climactic ordering of sentence elements. In episodic composition, the consideration of emphasis is but a continuation of the same general

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Carpenter and Brewster's *Modern English Prose*.

principle. The consideration of phrases, clauses, and sentences is supplemented by that of successive episodes and the problem of how they shall be so arranged as to bring out with effectiveness the culmination toward which the narrative as a whole is directed. It is therefore apparent that in episodic narration emphasis is of a two-fold nature: it is a matter of sentence mechanics, — of what we may call external style, — and, more than that, of selection and judgment as to the relative position, order, and importance of the constituent episodes, irrespective of the style in which they may be phrased. Yet these two elements must go hand in hand. A writer may possess all the phrasal vigor of Macaulay or of G. K. Chesterton, but, if he lack the dramatic sense whereby the natural story-teller so masses his details as to provoke suspense and to attain climax, his narrative will lag. On the other hand, even if a writer have the story-teller's instinct in all the perfection of Scott or of Stevenson, he will gain in fervor, in energy, if he can stimulate the narrative with the red blood of effective phraseology. An example of the vigor that comes from the effective massing of episodes may be found in Aldrich's *Marjorie Daw*. In this story the essential point of the entire narrative is cleverly kept out of sight to the very end, and there flashed upon the reader with startling vividness. Another instance of effective arrangement appears in James Lane Allen's *Flute and Violin*, — not so much in the dramatic climax as in the ordering of the episodic details in such a way that interest is consistently maintained. Every episode bears intimately upon its neighbor. The action moves rapidly, now forward, now backward. One event elucidates another, and the story in its entirety possesses not only coherence but a power that compels interest.

Then again, the writer of episodic narration, if his work is to possess animation, — another name for this same rhetorical quality, — must make his account move. More than that, as one writer has said, the story must not only move, it must *move on*. Marking time results in dreariness. Pirouettes and caracols in literary expression may fill the reader with admiration for the writer's rhetorical agility, but they do not advance narration, which by its very definition demands *action*. The episodes selected by the author must, in order to be forceful, present two characteristics: (a) they must in themselves have interest, and (b) they must promote the movement toward the completion of the "occurrence." What constitutes interest in the details will, of course, differ with the character of the chronicle. Details that in one case may possess the dynamic quality may in another be wholly sedative. In a story like *The Great Stone Face* the simple episodes of Mr. Gathergold's return, old Blood-and-Thunder's visit, and the other little ripples in quiet village life are of great import in view of the allegorical basis of the story; but in a narrative instinct with dramatic force or intricate with plot complication they would be prosaic enough. Furthermore, the selected episodes must hurry the constituent details along to their logical conclusion. The episodes indicated on page 4 as the essential parts of *Silas Marner* illustrate this. They secure progress and the narrative moves distinctly forward toward the weaver's closing days of content and to the completion of his regeneration. Considerations like these are intimately connected with plot structure, and will receive fuller treatment in a later chapter.

It may be noted at this point that in historic narration the writer has less freedom in the manipulation of his episodes than has the writer of fiction. Lockhart, in

his biography of Scott, was far more limited in the ordering of his data than was Scott in arranging the various episodes of *Ivanhoe*. The writer of fiction can, for the exigencies of emphasis or dramatic effect, leap over a dozen years, to resume later the interrupted thread or to leave the gap blank, as his judgment may dictate. The chronicler of fact, however, may seldom resort to artifice, but is bound to the prosaic order of actual occurrence, save as several parallel episodes may permit him to complete one and then revert to another that he may develop it in turn and thus bring several simultaneous events down to one starting point for further continuance of the record. This method of the historian is affected by Scott in three successive chapters of *Ivanhoe* (xxii, xxiii, xxiv). In the first, we are in the dungeon beneath Torquilstone, where Front de Bœuf threatens Isaac of York in the effort to extort a thousand silver pounds. In the second, De Bracy presses his attentions upon the Lady Rowena, while the events just indicated are taking place below. And in the third, in the chamber of Rebecca, the persecution of the Jew's daughter by the disguised Templar is interrupted by the trumpet of the besiegers outside the castle walls. All of these chapters represent exactly simultaneous action and each brings its respective episode to completion before the story is resumed in the chapter that succeeds the last of the series.

### (3) Proportion

Closely allied to emphasis is proportion. This plays no great part in narrative composition until the item develops into episodic composition. So simple are the details of the isolated occurrence that no one detail is likely to be so grossly exaggerated above the rest as to disturb the equilibrium of the complete chronicle. In episodic



narration, however, with the increased complexity of the integral units, comes the danger that over-elaboration in some one part will disturb the general effect of the whole. Digressions are often attractive. Enticing side-paths draw one from the beaten track, and the reader finds himself in the predicament of the Red Cross Knight in Error's "wandering wood." Every reader of *Tom Jones* remembers the Man of the Hill, and how the entire narrative is halted while this apparently supererogatory episode drowns along its dreary course, and the main current of the story is resumed with difficulty. Sometimes a fondness for description beguiles the writer into the elaboration of setting until the narrative element is completely dwarfed. Again, expositions of character, important enough in their way, usurp the place of action, and the narrative becomes but a study in psychologic analysis, as is more than once the case in *Daniel Deronda* and *Romola*. And these violations of proportion carry with them loss of narrative vitality.

In historical and biographical narration there is less likelihood than in fiction of destroying emphasis by the violation of true episodic proportion. The chronicler of fact, — if he be a historian in the best sense of the word, — will be restrained by a saving sanity as to relative values. No heat of passion will make him unscrupulous, and his regard for the truth will prevent his wandering from the way. As soon as the historian is discovered to be a rider of hobbies just so soon the discerning reader will discount his statements, however forceful the phrasing. Doing violence to true proportion, distorting the truth through personal bias and prejudice, he will be only superficially forceful and his vigor will neither persuade nor convince. The emphatic periods of Macaulay are viewed with distrust because to him Wil-

liam was the sole measure of all that could be termed kingly and a Whig the perfect type of true patriotism. His force becomes therefore merely the force of expression, and lacks the greater emphasis that comes with a sane and catholic attitude to history.

#### (4) Coherence

Coherence as an element in episodic narration is so closely related to the complication of details known as "plot" that a thorough discussion may best be postponed until that phase of the subject is taken up. In general, however, it may be said that episodic coherence concerns itself mainly with the succession of the constituent events and not so much with the mere matter of connectives as does the item. Of course the question of clause-articulation does not entirely disappear as an element to be reckoned with, — coherence is a constant rhetorical quality of style, — but in weaving his narrative the writer gives increased attention to the problem of order. The simple conjunctives are now superseded by paragraphs or sentences of transition, so called, familiar to all students of rhetoric, and exemplified in the analysis of the story to follow (pp. 59-64).

Mere chronology, however, is not all that the narrative writer now has to deal with. The logical sequence of cause and effect as manifested in character and action plays a very important part, — more important, if possible, than in securing unity. The historian and the biographer are not satisfied with the mere arrangement of their material in the order of time. They must show that the events of one epoch are the logical outcome of preceding periods; that, unlike as may be Puritan England to the England of two centuries earlier, yet the evolution of the one into the other may be traced. They

must convince their readers that the personality of the mature statesman or of the poet is in entire harmony with the character, the environment, the promise of earlier youth. The writer of fiction, whether it be of intricate plot narratives like those by Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, and Anna Katherine Green, or of character studies like the novels of George Eliot and Mrs. Humphry Ward, is under obligations to see the end from the beginning and to develop the action coherently in accord with the natural sequence of experience and human nature. Failure to observe the canons of coherence condemns the narrative as unnatural, illogical, impossible.

In view of all this, one can readily see that coherence is closely allied to unity and to emphasis. In order to secure that subtle one-ness that gives totality to any well written account of a transaction, the mutual connection of parts and their best order must be considered. And, again, in discovering the order that shall best mass these parts so as to produce the fullness of dramatic effect, the sequence of detail after detail becomes a matter of no little importance.

What has been said regarding the various rhetorical qualities of episodic narration may be epitomized by a concrete illustration drawn from *Flute and Violin*, to which reference has more than once been made.

To begin with, the successive principal episodes are indicated by the sections into which the author has divided his narrative. Arranged with suitable titles they stand as follows: —

#### THE PARSON'S MAGIC FLUTE

- I. The Reverend James Moore.
- II. The Passing of the Flute.

## A BOY'S VIOLIN

- III. David.
- IV. The Impressario.
- V. Outside the Museum.
- VI. Bliss.
- VII. Misery.
- VIII. Afterwards.

If we examine into the eight episodes that constitute this little story, we shall find the germ of the whole in one brief paragraph:—

As time passed on it became evident that some grave occurrence indeed had befallen him. Thenceforth, and during the five remaining years of his life, he was never quite the same. For months his faculties, long used to being soothed at midnight by the music of the flute, were like children put to bed hungry and refused to be quieted, so that sleep came to him only after hours of waiting and tossing, and his health suffered in consequence. And then in all things he lived like one who was watching himself closely as a person not to be trusted.

Unity of atmosphere the story certainly possesses, and that atmosphere is pathos, — the pathos of tragedy arising from misunderstanding. Everything is shaped to the exposition of this one idea: the simplicity, the gentleness, the thorough loveliness of the one principal actor; the wistfulness, the helplessness, the appealing isolation of the other. The eccentricities of the parson, the selfishness of Tom, the humor of Widow Spurlock and of Arsena Furnace — in fact all the details of the action — blend into one consistent note of pathos. No jarring incongruity mars the general effect. A consistent point of view is maintained throughout.

Emphasis, or effective massing, in *Flute and Violin* re-

solves itself into the question of so arranging the details of the story as to hold the attention of the reader. In this case surprise is not the source of emotional arousement. Effectiveness does not demand any sudden revelation of concealed mystery, any clever unraveling of complicated details. Rather, the reader's interest centres in the pathetic appeal arising from the accumulated evils that fall to the fate of the little cripple through the seeming thoughtlessness of the loving parson. In view of these conditions, the author has chosen a very simple and natural mode of massing his story. At the outset he presents a brief introduction in two chapters. This accomplishes two ends: it arouses interest in the kindly personality of the Reverend James Moore, and it implies that in the current of his simple life there has been an eddy. The device in a small way serves the purpose of presenting an initial mystery that must be solved. Then follows the story with its six episodes. These, despite their somewhat complicated ordering, to be noted later under the coherence of the story, carry the narrative step by step to its culmination in the tragedy of David's death, followed by the brief conclusion dealing with the saddened later days of James Moore.

And thus being ever the more loved and revered as he grew ever the more lovable and saint-like, he passed onward to the close. But not until the end came did he once stretch forth a hand to touch his flute; and it was only in imagination then that he grasped it, to sound the final roll-call of his wandering faculties, and to blow a last good-night to his tired spirit.

Thus the story reaches a mild climax, and the massing is, in general, that of a chronological succession with increasing emotional force.

The study of coherence in *Flute and Violin* brings us

to the manner of coupling the coherent details of the story: that is, to an analysis of its plot-structure. Taking it up episode by episode, we note the following facts:

Episode I covers in a general way the years from 1792, when the Reverend James Moore first came to Lexington, to 1814, the close of his life. Here we have a bird's-eye view of the parson's simple life with the closing suggestion that it contained an event of unusual interest, — the bond coupling the episode with what follows.

Such having been the parson's fixed habit as long as any one had known him, it is hard to believe that five years before his death he abruptly ceased to play his flute and never touched it again. But from this point the narrative becomes so mysterious that it were better to have the testimony of witnesses.

In episode II we have an enlargement of what was indicated in this introduction, but expressed in vague terms, forming a conclusion to what has preceded, but indicating something to follow and thus leading the way to the story proper. The concluding words of the episode serve to couple it with what follows and to introduce the main action contained in episode III: —

If any one should feel interested in having this whole mystery cleared up, he may read the following tale of a boy's violin.

In the third episode the main action centres about David on the day of the great lottery, — Friday, August 31, 1809, about ten o'clock in the morning. During the episode the action reverts by three years to the time when David's father had died, and again by one year to the day when Mr. Leuba had promised to bestow on David the discarded violin. But these back-casts of the

action are wholly subordinate, and do not detract from the time-setting of the main episode.

The episode following, the fourth, brings the reader to a scene two hours later on this same Friday morning, again with two slight reversions to incidents occurring between this and the preceding occurrence, — David's visit home and the announcement of the drawing in the lottery. By the introduction of these two minor details the coherence becomes almost continuous, and the story is brought to the fifth episode.

This takes up the narrative and continues it through the afternoon and twilight of the same day.

The sixth takes the reader through the following day, Saturday, September 1, by four distinct and separate episodes of the second order (p. 28) as follows: (a) early in the day, at the church; (b) at dinner with the Leubas and their merry company; (c) in the afternoon, at the Museum; and (d) later, at home, where the parson executes the mystic manœuvres noted by observing eyes across the way, as described in the second episode of the story.

The next episode is introduced by a brief transitional paragraph: —

A sad day it had been meantime for the poor lad.

The entire episode reverts from the point at which the preceding scene closed, Saturday afternoon, back to the morning of the same day, and concerns itself with the experiences of David, as the preceding has done with the parson. The fortunes of the little cripple follow in order: (a) in the morning, at home and at the Museum; (b) in the afternoon, at the Museum, at the parson's door (as already narrated in episode II) and again at the Museum; (c) about nightfall, at the end of the town,

at Leuba's store, and finally at home. This simultaneous ordering of VI and VII presents an example of the device referred to on page 56 and holds the action stationary for the time being.

Episode VIII resumes the story on Sunday morning, September 2, follows it through the morning and afternoon with David and through the evening at Mr. Moore's, and again reverts to David at the hour of the boy's death early on Monday morning. It then takes a leap to September 9, the Sunday following, and closes with a brief retrospect of the parson's remaining years (already quoted on page 61), a good example of the "concluding paragraph."

The story thus affords illustration of how the element of time, with slight modifications, secures the coherence of an "orderly recital." First a general survey of the action to its culmination, and then a reversion to the beginning, followed by a detailed recital of the successive events in their chronological order. The smooth and natural issuance of one episode from another, the close relation of each detail to what precedes and to what follows, shows further the close association between coherence and unity of action. With greater complication of incident and with more intricacy of massing so as to secure added interest would come the development of plot characteristic of the detective story or of the novel. *Flute and Violin*, however, with its general adherence to the actual sequence of time, is constructed after the method of veritable history.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BACKGROUND OF THE ACTION: SETTING

IF one examines a complete piece of narration, — Maupassant's *Happiness* (*Le Bonheur*) for instance, — he will, in most cases, be able to distinguish three separate elements that together constitute the story. First of all is the stage upon which the action takes place, the background against which the scene is projected. This element is known as **SETTING**. In the story just cited it is represented by Corsica with its storm of mountains and rolling torrents, its high forests and desert soil, its untutored inhabitants, deaf and blind even to the crude arts of ordinary peasantry. Against this rude and inhospitable background the story of devoted love stands out in brilliant vividness. Setting is an integral part of the story: remove it, or even alter it, and the effect of the narrative is changed.

The second essential to the structure of a narrative is **CHARACTER**, and this is presented in the *dramatis personæ*. In Maupassant's story this appears primarily in the aged hero and heroine, and subordinately in the several minor personages, such as the narrator, the Brisemares, the Sirmonts, etc.

The third element is **PLOT**, or the action participated in by the characters and projected upon the given setting. The main plot of *Happiness* is, of course, concerned with the elopement of Suzanne de Sirmont and the young hussar, and with their humble life on the bleak island of the Mediterranean.

These, then, are the three fundamentals of complete narrative writing: setting, character, plot. In some narratives one is elaborated at the expense of the others; in some, as in *Happiness*, each is distinct. Setting, from its very nature, does not exist for its own sake, being but the background for more important elements. Setting, indeed, is often entirely omitted, or, at least, so suppressed that some little study is necessary to detect it. The *Parable of the Prodigal Son* illustrates this. The "far country," the "riotous living," the "elder brother in the field," and the "sounds of music and dancing" suggest details easily capable of elaboration; but the story as it stands is constructed mainly on a foundation of character (the younger son, the father, the elder brother) and of plot (the spendthrift life, the repentance, the forgiveness).

Plot and character, usually with the aid of setting, divide between them much of the best narrative writing. This is well illustrated in extended prose fiction. We have, on the one hand, novels in which the principal stress is given to the personal element; and, on the other, those wherein deeds are all-important. Novelists like George Eliot and George Meredith afford illustrations of the first; Scott and Stevenson, of the second. Although *Daniel Deronda* and *The Egoist* present no small amount of setting and plot, yet, after all, in the portrayal of character — the careful study of Gwendolyn Harleth and of Sir Willoughby Patterne — lies the main purpose. On the other hand, the principal concern of Scott and Stevenson is to tell a good story, to arouse interest in the action, not to dissect motives or to conduct psychological experiments. *Rob Roy* and *The Master of Ballantrae* indeed contain many memorable scenes and present personalities vivid in their truth to actual life, but the for-

tunes of the house of Osbaldistone and of Ballantræ are of greater structural importance than is the personality of Baillie Nicol Jarvie or of James Durie.

### SETTING DEFINED

Setting may be defined as the background of the action in a narrative; it usually presents (1) the time and (2) the place of that action. If we revert to our original definition of narration, we shall see that setting is not an integral part of the process, but is rather a device for the more effective presentation of the action. In so far as this is true, setting would seem, as a matter of rhetorical consideration, to be allied to emphasis. Again, however, as a definite exposition of place and time often enter into and harmonize the constituent parts of the entire action, giving an essential one-ness of effect to the account in its entirety, setting is closely associated also with unity. *Happiness* presents an excellent illustration of the pervading harmony of effect that may come from artistic setting.

Setting may be divided into two distinct classes: (a) expository and (b) dramatic. Expository setting presents background for the clearer *understanding* of the action; that is, its function is purely intellectual. Dramatic setting, on the other hand, is emotional; its purpose is to intensify the action, to make it more effective, more vivid, more thrilling.

### EXPOSITORY AND DRAMATIC SETTING

When the newspaper account of a political convention, of a railway accident, or of a robbery is prefaced by a carefully elaborated exposition of the scene of action, abounding in painstaking detail and accompanied by photographic illustration, its purpose is not only to in-

crease interest in the account but to identify, to make thoroughly intelligible to the reader, the details that follow. The appeal is to the understanding; not to the emotions.

The following undergraduate attempts at expository setting, based upon actual observation, serve this intellectual purpose. The subject from which each one is drawn appears in the appended cut.



A comparison of the two examples illustrates also how the power of observation varies in different persons: the author of the first sketch is apparently gifted with the ability to catch essential details; and the author of the second is not, with the result that the outlines of his picture are so vague, so lacking in definiteness, as to furnish scant material for one who should attempt from the details presented to reproduce the object described.

(a) Before entering the village by the main street, as I was returning from a walk one October afternoon, I stopped at the bridge over the little stream which at the foot of the last hill runs nearly north and south. While I was resting there, leaning on the railing at the side of the bridge, my attention was attracted to a two-story white building across the stream, about twenty-five or thirty paces to the left of the road.

The main building was oblong. A little lower than the ridge-pole and midway across the front a gable projected, supported by four large white pillars, and serving as a covering to a small porch. On the left of the house a veranda extended to a low shed attached at right angles to the main structure and extending out about twenty feet. The roof of the veranda sloped upward until it met the main building just below the windows of the second story, and, like the roof of the main portion, it was covered with weather-beaten shingles. The ridge-pole of the shed was lower than that of the house itself, — so low, in fact, that the only use to which the shed could be put was that of woodhouse or storeroom. It was partly obscured by a large willow tree, growing on the bank of the stream at some distance from the dwelling.

The house was built of wood, and stood on a foundation of white marble, one layer of which could be seen above the ground. The main part of the house was painted white, and with its green shutters and four white pillars supporting the gable in front, it looked like an old colonial mansion on a somewhat small scale.

In front of the dwelling were four great maples, their leaves a blaze of color. A little to the right of the house, stood a single elm. The approach to the front porch was by a cinder path, directly in front and nearly straight, turning slightly to the east and terminating in three steps. Another path of the same material led from the front porch to the side veranda, which was about four steps from the ground. Between the two paths and the point where I stood, a road entered the yard, and wound to the left, around an oval plot of grass in front of the shed. The lawn in front of the house and within

## 70 RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES OF NARRATION

the turn of the road was thickly strewn with leaves, and on every hand the signs of approaching winter were visible.

As I stood making a mental note of these details, suddenly — etc.

(b) As one passes up the main street of the village past the lodge of the Alpha Omega fraternity, he soon reaches the bridge leading over Willow Brook. At some distance from this point and to the right of the road stands a large white frame house. A low porch, standing at the center of the front part of the building, is almost half occupied with four large columns. They extend upward about a story and a half and support a projecting part of the third story.

These tall columns and the white color of the house give it a distinctly colonial air. The porch is painted brown and the shutters are green. Were it not for the weather-beaten and somewhat dismantled appearance of the shingled roof, the house might impress one as being new.

Here it was that — etc.

In each of these pictures, preliminary to details of action, the same purpose is evident: the writer is presenting his setting for the purpose of identification, in order to objectify the scene that the reader may follow it intelligently.

Illustration of how pure exposition or description shades off into what we have called expository setting appears in the two selections following, chosen respectively from Windle's *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy* and from Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Both have to do with the same subject, the little church at Puddletown, or "Weatherbury" as the novelist has rechristened the place in his Wessex stories.

A little further on again, and we enter Puddletown, the Weatherbury of "Far from the Madding Crowd," and, as we

enter the village, we shall see, opposite to the principal inn, a grey house behind a high wall, which occupies the position of the farm over which Bathsheba Everdene presided. It corresponds to it, however, in position only, for the building from which its structural characteristics were drawn is at some little distance off, and has yet to be seen. The church is the first object of interest, and is well worthy of careful study for its own intrinsic merits, apart altogether from its connection with the story, since it is about the only edifice of its kind in Dorsetshire which has been so fortunate as to escape the hands of the "restorer." It contains a fine Jacobean gallery, in which the voice of Gabriel Oak used to be heard as he sang bass in the choir, a very beautiful and almost unique Norman font, and some fine tombs, amongst them many belonging to the family of Martin, which formerly occupied the stately house of Athelhampton not far from the village. The porch, in which Troy slept on the night after Fanny Robin's funeral, is that on the north side, and cannot be said to have been improved by the dado of encaustic tiles with which it has been bedecked. The fine tower is battlemented, as Mr. Hardy describes, but the gurgoyles are not specially remarkable. Perhaps he added to it some of those at Sydling St. Nicholas, no very great distance off, which are as grotesque as the medieval mind could desire.<sup>1</sup>

Turning now to chapter XLVI of *Far from the Mad-ding Crowd*, we come to these two paragraphs at the very beginning: —

The tower of Weatherbury Church was a square erection of fourteenth-century date, having two stone gurgoyles on each of the four faces of its parapet. Of these eight carved protuberances only two at this time continued to serve the purpose of their erection — that of spouting the water from the lead roof within. One mouth in each front had been closed by bygone church-wardens as superfluous, and two others were

<sup>1</sup> *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy*, by B. C. A. Windle. By permission of John Lane Company, N. Y.

broken away and choked — a matter not of much consequence to the well-being of the tower, for the two mouths which still remained open and active were gaping enough to do all the work.

It has been sometimes argued that there is no truer criterion of the vitality of any given art-period than the power of the master-spirits of that time in grotesque; and certainly in the instance of Gothic art there is no disputing the proposition. Weatherbury tower was a somewhat early instance of the use of an ornamental parapet in parish as distinct from cathedral churches, and the gurgoyles, which are the necessary correlatives of a parapet, were exceptionally prominent — of the boldest cut that the hand could shape, and of the most original design that a human brain could conceive. There was, so to speak, that symmetry in their distortion which is less the characteristic of British than of Continental grotesques of the period. All the eight were different from each other. A beholder was convinced that nothing on earth could be more hideous than those he saw on the north side until he went round to the south. Of the two on this latter face, only that at the south-eastern corner concerns the story. It was too human to be called like a dragon, too impish to be like a man, too animal to be like a fiend, and not enough like a bird to be called a griffin. This horrible stone entity was fashioned as if covered with a wrinkled hide; it had short, erect ears, eyes starting from their sockets, and its fingers and hands were seizing the corners of its mouth, which they thus seemed to pull open to give free passage to the water it vomited. The lower row of teeth was quite washed away, though the upper still remained. Here and thus, jutting a couple of feet from the wall against which its feet rested as a support, the creature had for four hundred years laughed at the surrounding landscape, voicelessly in dry weather, and in wet with a gurgling and snorting sound.

These two paragraphs thrown into the midst of the novel at once suggest the same purpose as that of the



citation from *The Hardy Country*,—identification. The reader may use this portion of the novel as his guide when he visits the sleepy little Dorset town, and in so far as the passage serves the purpose of making clear the exact, veritable scene chosen for the action of the story—that is, of identification—it may be called expository setting. It is also expository setting in that, aside from representing any actual architectural curiosity, it serves by its definiteness to objectify the scene to the reader's mind. But, while the picture may serve both of these purposes, it does something more. The grotesque ornament is an altogether fitting emblem of the ironic fate that was pursuing Troy and rendering abortive his belated attempt at repentance. And, in so far as the setting intensifies in this way the effectiveness of the action, it may be called dramatic. Where the one merges into the other it is not easy to distinguish.

Expository setting often attends the chronicling of historic events. A good example may be found in the account of the distribution of Harold's forces before the battle of Hastings as chronicled in book XII, chapter VII of Bulwer-Lytton's *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*. In this case, save in that the sentimental reader may experience a certain sense of pathos, arising from the loyalty and devotion of the simple Saxon warriors, the setting serves merely to expound the scene for a better understanding of the somewhat complicated military manœuvres to follow.

Probably the most famous example of this sort of setting is Victor Hugo's picture of the field of Waterloo, in *Les Misérables*, where he uses the letter "A" as the ground-plan for the distribution of his details:—

Those persons who wish to gain a clear idea of the battle of Waterloo have only to place, mentally, on the ground, a capital A. The left limb of the A is the road to Nivelles, the right limb is the road to Genappe, the tie of the A is the hollow road to Ohain from Braine l'Alleud. The top of the A is Mont-Saint-Jean, where Wellington is; the lower left tip is Hougomont, where Reille is stationed with Jerome Bonaparte; the right tip is the Belle-Alliance, where Napoleon was. At the centre of this chord is the precise point where the final word of the battle was pronounced. It was there that the lion has been placed, the involuntary symbol of the supreme heroism of the Imperial Guard.

The triangle included in the top of the A, between the two limbs and the tie, is the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean. The dispute over this plateau constituted the whole battle. The wings of the two armies extended to the right and left of the two roads to Genappe and Nivelles; d'Erlon facing Picton, Reille facing Hill.

Behind the tip of the A, behind the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean, is the forest of Soignes.

In these examples from Bulwer-Lytton and Hugo the purpose is primarily intellectual. Of course, in each case, the account that follows the setting gains in vividness by the preliminary exposition, but the vividness is desirable mainly in order that the reader may follow *understandingly* the historical data of Hastings or of Waterloo, rather than that he may receive any æsthetic enjoyment from the picture as a picture.

In contrast to the preceding selections, however, is the following passage from *Happiness*:—

Picture to yourself a world that is still chaos, a storm of mountains separated by narrow passes and rushing torrents; not a single plain, but immense stretches of granite and giant undulations of earth covered with underbrush or with lofty forests of chestnut and pine. It is a virgin soil, uncultivated,

desert, although sometimes you catch sight of a village, like a heap of rocks, on the summit of a mountain. No culture, no industries, no art. You never see a bit of wood-work or of sculptured stone, not a trace of rude or of refined taste, showing that the ancestors of these people loved graceful and beautiful things. This is the most striking feature of that wonderful but hard country: its indifference to the search after beauty which we call Art.

Italy, where every palace, full of masterpieces, is itself a masterpiece, where marble, wood, bronze, iron, metal, and stone all bear witness to man's genius, where the smallest relics that lie about in old houses reveal the divine love of the graceful, — Italy is to all of us the sacred country that we love because she points out to us and bears witness to the effort, the grandeur, the power, and the triumph of creative intelligence.

And face to face with her the savage Corsica stands exactly as she stood in her earliest days. A man lives there in his rude hovel, indifferent to everything that does not affect his own immediate life or his family feuds. He has all the vices and traits of uncivilized peoples; he is violent, malignant, brutal, with no thought of remorse; yet he is also hospitable, generous, devoted, simple, opening his door to passers-by and offering the loyalty of a friend at the least sign of kindness.

The purpose of this carefully elaborated description is certainly not to localize the scene of the narrative for any purpose of identification. Rather it is to heighten the effect of the romance of Suzanne de Sirmont's life, to emphasize the sufficiency of her love amid the hardships of poverty and exile. The harsh, rude background of Corsica intensifies the effect of the harsh, rude peasant life. Here the effect of the setting is clearly æsthetic, rather than merely expository.

The stories of Edgar Allan Poe are familiar examples of the power that comes from dramatic setting. In them the sense of horror, suspense, or other emotional appeal

is immensely deepened by the description of the surroundings that attend the action. In *Richard Yea-and-Nay* Hewlett makes memorable use of dramatic setting in the chapter entitled "The Tower of Flies," to intensify the effect of a scene in which two cowardly conspirators meet to plan the assassination of the King.

An intensification of the effect of dramatic setting is observed when the character of the background — while of course remaining constant — seemingly changes in accord with the action projected against it. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* furnishes illustration of the matter in point. On the night following their marriage, Tess and Angel Clare sit by the fireside in the old D'Urberville manor, and Tess nerves herself to confess to her husband the story of her tragic past: —

A steady crimson glare from the now flameless embers painted the sides and back of the fireplace with its color, and the well-polished andirons, and the old brass tongs that would not meet. The underside of the mantel-shelf was flushed with the unwavering blood-colored light, and the legs of the table nearest the fire. Tess's face and neck reflected the same warmth; which each diamond turned into an Aldebaran or a Sirius — a constellation of white, red, and green flashes, that interchanged their hues with her every pulsation. . . . The ashes under the grate were lit by the fire vertically, like a torrid waste. Her imagination suddenly beheld a Last Day luridness in this red-coaled glow. It still fell on his face and hand, and on hers, peering into the loose hair about her brow, and firing the delicate skin underneath. A large shadow of her shape rose upon the wall and ceiling. She bent forward, at which each diamond on her neck gave a sinister wink like a toad's, and pressing her forehead against his temple she entered on the story of her acquaintance with Alec D'Urberville and its results.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Copyright, 1891, 1892, 1893 by Harper and Brothers.

In the luridness of this entire scene, with its pulsating colors, flickering shadows and spectral half-lights, the dramatic values of the situation are vastly increased; and, more than that, in some vague, indefinite way, the reader feels in advance the utter futility of Tess's confession. But with the last words of her narrative, a change seems to come over the picture, which, as a matter of prosaic fact, of course remains unchanged; and now, instead of the spectral, portentous effect, the same background presents an impish, unresponsive face to the girl's appeal and cry for love: —

The complexion even of external things suffered transmutation as her announcement progressed. The fire in the grate grew impish — demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it, too, did not care. The light from the water-bottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. And yet nothing had changed since the moments when he had been kissing her; or rather, nothing in the substance of things.<sup>1</sup>

In scenes such as these the writer simply avails himself of a phenomenon that is common enough: the seeming responsiveness of nature to one's mood of the moment; the tendency to read into the sunlight or the shadow a reflection of the joy or of the sadness within. And just as in the actual experiences of life there is a certain intensifying of the emotion by this process of personification, so when the portraiture of life is transferred to written discourse the device of dramatic setting energizes the emotional possibilities of the account.

But the æsthetic value of setting often arises from the very unlikeness between the background and the action;

<sup>1</sup> Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Copyright, 1891, 1892, 1893 by Harper and Brothers.

from contrast rather than from similarity. *Happiness* affords illustration of this as well as of the preceding principle of harmony. The story of faithfulness in love amid the hardships of primeval surroundings is projected against the background of a fashionable gathering at a seaside villa and a conventional, dilettante discussion of love, wherein worldly men and shallow women analyze, extemporize definitions, and draw artificial distinctions regarding fidelity; while before them

Corsica was sinking into the night, slowly disappearing into the sea, blotting out her great shadow, that had appeared as if to relate in person the story of the two humble lovers sheltered on her coast.

Stevenson's *Markheim* offers abundant study of effects in setting, and among them none is more dynamic than the contrast between the chaos and riot in the murderer's mind and the absolute silence of the deserted house where crime has been committed — a contrast made doubly effective by the maddening ticking of the innumerable clocks and the successive striking of the hour in tones varying from the deep cathedral chime to the treble notes of the prelude of a waltz. All these emphatic reminders of silence throw into startling relief the mental condition of the murderer, bordering, as he is, on madness.

History, as well as fiction, makes use of the same device, thus bringing out with added intensity the picturesqueness, the significance, the tragedy of actual occurrence. Parkman's story of Braddock's defeat utilizes dramatic setting for this purpose by throwing into striking contrast (1) the orderly array of the English ranks as, in martial order, they advanced into the silent depths of the primeval American forest and (2) the subsequent scene of disorder, carnage, and havoc.

It was past noon of a day brightened with the clear sunlight of an American midsummer, when the forces of Braddock began, for a second time, to cross the Monongahela, at the fording-place, which to this day bears the name of their ill-fated leader. The scarlet columns of the British regulars, complete in martial appointment, the rude backwoodsmen with shouldered rifles, the trains of artillery and the white-topped wagons, moved on in long procession through the shallow current, and slowly mounted the opposing bank.

. . . With steady and well-ordered march, the troops advanced into the great labyrinth of woods which shadowed the eastern borders of the river. Rank after rank vanished from sight. The forest swallowed them up, and the silence of the wilderness sank down once more on the shores and waters of the Monongahela.<sup>1</sup>

Then follow the surprise by the French and Indians concealed behind the trees and bushes of the densely wooded ravines; the discordant cries of the men and the roar of the murderous volleys; the disordered grenadiers insane with terror, panic-stricken, helpless, huddled together in the face of an invisible enemy; the general, storming and shouting, and finally borne from the field mortally wounded; Washington alone cool and undaunted, at the head of his Virginia frontiersmen, vainly striving to restore order; and, finally, the tumultuous flight across the river. Much of the dramatic vigor of this narrative is due to the effective contrast thus presented in the setting.

Sometimes dramatic setting is more than mere background for the action. Men not only live amid their surroundings, but from the nature of their surroundings

<sup>1</sup> From *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*. Copyright, 1870, by Francis Parkman. Copyright, 1898, by Grace P. Coffin and Katherine S. Coolidge.

their characters often take shape. To revert for illustration to the Parable of the Prodigal Son, one may argue that the experiences of the "far country," separation from kindred and friends, together with the chastening effects of adverse fortune, combined to produce the spirit that distinguished the humble penitent from the pleasure-loving prodigal. The implied setting of this story is really more than mere background; it is a factor in the two other elements, character and action. Setting of this sort, which not only furnishes background but enters into and moulds character and action, is known by the scientific term "environment." The modern writer exemplifies the theory that environment modifies life, and he presents setting as an integral part of his work. In contemporary fiction, the novels of Zola are notable illustrations of the "deterministic" theory — that character is the product of two factors, heredity and environment. Thomas Hardy is the great exponent among English writers. In *Tess*, for example, almost every instance of elaborated descriptive detail serves the deeper purpose of determining the characters and the events that develop against the given background. The warm, sensuous atmosphere of Talbothays and the bleak chill and leaden drab of Flintcombe-Ash are not mere accidental circumstances attending certain details in Tess's career; rather they are actual agents entering into and moulding her life's tragedy.

Hawthorne, with his romantic imagination and poetic temperament, was prone to use this device in intensifying his narrative. In *The Great Stone Face* he gives a brilliant example of this type of dramatic setting: —

The Great Stone Face was a work of Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness, formed on the perpendicular side of a



mountain by some immense rocks, which had been thrown together in such a position as, when viewed at a proper distance, precisely to resemble the features of the human countenance. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, a hundred feet in height; the nose, with its long bridge; and the vast lips, which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage, and could discern only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the farther he withdrew from them, the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear; until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive.

Yet, mere mass of rock as it was, the contemplation of this wondrous natural phenomenon possessed an inspirational power over all those who lived within the range of its benignant aspect. Among these was Ernest, who with loving heart and helpful hand grew up under the shadow of the Great Stone Face.

From a happy yet often pensive child, he grew up to be a mild, quiet, unobtrusive boy, and sun-browned with labor in the fields, but with more intelligence brightening his aspect than is seen in many lads who have been taught at famous schools. Yet Ernest had had no teacher, save only that the Great Stone Face became one to him. When the toil of the day was over, he would gaze at it for hours, until he began to imagine that those vast features recognized him, and gave him a smile of kindness and encouragement, responsive to his own look of veneration.

And thus, ever growing in devotion to his ideal, the boy became a man and continued in the valley to serve his fellows. One day, Ernest, now a preacher of the Word, was addressing the people and among his hearers was a poet, gifted with the power of vision.

The poet, as he listened, felt that the being and character of Ernest were a nobler strain of poetry than he had ever written. His eyes glistening with tears, he gazed reverentially at the venerable man; and said within himself that never was there an aspect so worthy of a prophet and a sage as that mild, sweet, thoughtful countenance, with the glory of white hair diffused about it. At a distance, but distinctly to be seen, high up in the golden light of the setting sun, appeared the Great Stone Face, with hoary mists around it, like the white hairs around the brow of Ernest. Its look of grand beneficence seemed to embrace the world.

And in the venerable speaker, who since boyhood had been inspired by the constant contemplation of the Great Stone Face, the poet recognized the incarnation of all that those mighty features had prefigured.

In the preceding paragraphs we have the principal devices whereby background is made effective: (1) setting that is in harmony with the accompanying action; (2) setting that presents change correspondent to accompanying change in the action; (3) setting that is in contrast to the action; (4) setting that modifies action or character. We now pass to the consideration of certain well recognized phases of setting, known respectively as (1) local color, (2) atmosphere, and (3) symbolic setting.

### Local Color

Every well-defined period of time, every distinct place, has its own character, which we may term its

"color," its "tone." The writer who can catch the peculiar spirit of a generation, the distinctive atmosphere of a locality, gains much in the convincingness of his work. The position that *Westward Ho!* has gained in English historic fiction is to be attributed in large degree to Kingsley's success in catching the very spirit of Elizabethan days when, her ports crowded with ships returning from unknown countries and laden with strange freight of every description, her streets filled with swaggering dare-devils fresh from every conceivable adventure, England was aglow with life and a new world was opening at her doors. On the other hand, George Eliot's inability to reproduce the Florence of the fifteenth century underlies much of the adverse criticism that has been passed upon *Romola* as an example of unsuccessful historic fiction.

In so far as veritable history is narrative rather than expository, — that is, in so far as history is a chronicle of events rather than an attempt to extract from events a philosophy of historical evolution or to establish scientific generalizations, — to that extent history, like fiction, may make use of local color. It will strive to render as graphic as possible the time and the place of past events. This function of the narrator Macaulay has set forth in his essay on Hallam's *Constitutional History of England*. It is,

to make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture.

Although, as Macaulay goes on to say, the dramatic presentation thus indicated has, in large degree, been appropriated by the historic novelist, yet the historian has not neglected to profit by the advantages that come from effective portrayal of the time-spirit and of local color. Gibbon, Green, Froude, Parkman, all have shown what are the artistic possibilities of background. Yet from the fact already noted, that historic literature partakes so largely of the expository and intellectual nature, the best examples of local color are to be found elsewhere, particularly in the novel or the short story, where dramatic effect, rather than truth, is sought.

Excellent illustration of effectiveness in local color is to be found in the stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett, who have caught the peculiar spirit that differentiates New England from all other parts of this country. Similarly James Lane Allen has interpreted the spirit of Kentucky, George W. Cable that of the extreme South, George Eliot that of the English Midlands, and Thomas Hardy that of Dorsetshire. In the work of these writers setting is essential. It would amount to annihilation were background to be eliminated from such narratives as *A New England Nun*, *The Choir Invisible*, *Adam Bede*, or *The Return of the Native*.

Local color is more than the mere enumeration of characteristics. The dusty roadsides, the tapering spruces, the piping of hermit thrushes, and the pungent odor of pine needles are not enough to constitute a picture of the Maine woods. All these are nothing more than externals. In such a study of locality, for example, as Miss Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* there is the keen appreciation of everything, animate and inanimate, that gives personality to the region.

There was something about the coast town of Dunnet that made it seem more attractive than other maritime villages of eastern Maine. Perhaps it was the simple fact of acquaintance with that neighborhood which made it so attaching, and gave such interest to the rocky shore and dark woods, and the few houses which seemed to be securely wedged and tree-nailed in among the ledges by the landing. These houses made the most of their seaward view, and there was a gayety and determined floweriness in their bits of garden-ground; the small-paned high windows in the peaks of their steep gables were like knowing eyes that watched the harbor and the far sea-line beyond, or looked northward all along the shore and its background of spruces and balsam firs. When one really knows a village like this and its surroundings, it is like becoming acquainted with a single person. The process of falling in love at first sight is as final as it is swift in such a case, but the growth of true friendship may be a life-long affair.<sup>1</sup>

This poetic insight, this peculiar sensing of the human element in nature, is the secret of true local color. It demands appreciation of the inherent unity that combines all constituent parts into one individual entity, whether we call it color, tone, personality, or spirit.

When the very soul of a locality is caught, it may of course be utilized in any of the various ways already indicated as the methods of setting. It may render effective the action by its very fitness and harmony; or by contrast it may throw out into relief events wholly uncongenial amidst such setting. But whatever be the particular method by which the local color is utilized, it brings to the narrative unity of impression and effectiveness of presentation.

### Atmosphere

Closely allied to "local color" is "atmosphere." The atmosphere of a narrative may be defined as the product

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

of setting and action combined. It is found when the two elements are so conjoined that one distinct character pervades the whole. There is atmosphere, for example, in the opening scene of *Macbeth*, where the tragic weirdness of witches, heath, storm, and night so combine with inordinate passion and bloody deeds as to create a general, all-pervading note of tragedy. The same thing is illustrated in Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*, of which the opening paragraph reads: —

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers. When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

The magical hues and shapes of the Kaatskills, half revealed, half outlined in the gray vapors of the evening sun, throwing their long shadows across the misty valleys, are altogether in keeping with the mystical legend of Rip's long slumber and of his adventure with the spectral crew of the Half-Moon. Excellent instances of atmosphere are also to be found in the tales of Poe, wherein gloom and horror are projected against a background of sombreness and desolation.

Like local color, atmosphere demands primarily a sense of unity, but there is a difference. In seeking at-

mosphere the artist allows no dissonance in his details. Everything must harmonize action and setting. His task is largely one of elimination. On the other hand, in seeking for local color the writer excludes nothing; rather, he courts multiplicity of detail and seeks the ultimate combination that is the incarnation of them all.

### Symbolic Setting

The third variety of setting, the symbolic, is, as suggested by the name, confined in great degree to allegorical narrative. While, like all setting, it brings out with increased power the details of the action, at the same time it possesses a value of its own. In *The Great Stone Face*, for example, the titanic features sculptured on the precipice are more than a mere effective natural setting for the development of Ernest's simple personality. The reader feels that the face symbolizes something of the ideal, of the spiritual, the constant contemplation of which inspires the true man to the highest attainment.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens makes effective use of this phase of setting in the following passage:—

The night was so very sultry, that although they sat with doors and windows open, they were overpowered by heat. When the tea-table was done with, they all moved to one of the windows, and looked out into the heavy twilight. Lucie sat by her father; Darnay sat beside her; Carton leaned against a window. The curtains were long and white, and some of the thunder gusts that whirled into the corner caught them up to the ceiling, and waved them like spectral wings.

"The raindrops are still falling, large, heavy, and few," said Doctor Manette. "It comes slowly."

"It comes surely," said Carton.

They spoke low, as people watching and waiting mostly do;

as people in a dark room, watching and waiting for the Lightning, always do.

There was a great hurry in the streets of people speeding away to get shelter before the storm broke; the wonderful corner for echoes resounded with the echoes of footsteps coming and going, yet not a footstep was there.

"A multitude of people, and yet a solitude!" said Darnay, when they had listened for a while.

"Is it not impressive, Mr. Darnay?" asked Lucie. "Sometimes I have sat here of an evening, until I have fancied — but even the shade of a foolish fancy makes me shudder to-night, when all is so black and solemn —"

"Let us shudder too. We may know what it is?"

"It will seem nothing to you. Such whims are only impressive as we originate them, I think; they are not to be communicated. I have sometimes sat alone here of an evening listening, until I have made the echoes out to be the echoes of all the footsteps that are coming by and by into our lives."

"There is a great crowd coming one day into our lives, if that be so," Sydney Carton struck in, in his moody way.

The footsteps were incessant, and the hurry of them became more and more rapid. The corner echoed and re-echoed with the tread of feet; some, as it seemed, under the windows; some, as it seemed, in the room; some coming, some going, some breaking off, some stopping altogether; all in the distant streets, and not one within sight.

"Are all these footsteps destined to come to all of us, Miss Manette, or are we to divide them among us?"

"I don't know, Mr. Darnay; I told you it was a foolish fancy, but you asked for it. When I have yielded myself to it, I have been alone, and then I have imagined them the footsteps of the people who are to come into my life, and my father's."

"I take them into mine!" said Carton. "I ask no questions and make no stipulations. There is a great crowd bearing down upon us, Miss Manette, and I see them! — by the Lightning." He added the last words, after there had been a vivid flash which had shown him lounging in the window.



"And I hear them!" he added again, after a peal of thunder. "Here they come, fast, fierce, and furious!"

It was the rush and roar of rain that he typified, and it stopped him, for no voice could be heard in it. A memorable storm of thunder and lightning broke with that sweep of water, and there was not a moment's interval in crash, and fire, and rain, until after the moon rose at midnight.

The setting that runs through this episode of the thunder storm is not primarily for the more effective projection of the action, but, as in Hawthorne's story of Ernest, it is written with view to the implication. The scene is allegorical, and foreshadows the tragic events destined to appear in the drama of Lucie and her father. The hurrying footsteps, Carton's thoughtless words, the onward rush and roar of the approaching storm unmistakably represent the many people that are to enter their lives, the sacrifice that Carton is to make for Lucie without stipulating conditions, the darkness that is to settle over them all as the Revolution closes in. The spectral waving of the curtains, the crashing of the thunder, the mysterious footsteps ever coming and ever going but never passing, — all these details contribute to the fatefulness of the scene and foretell something in store.

Symbolic setting is essentially unlike local color, indeed unlike almost all other dramatic setting, in that while in one sense it is background, it is, in fact, part of the action. It is akin to atmosphere rather than to local color, but it is more even than atmosphere. In Hawthorne's story of Ernest the setting, it is true, is peculiarly in harmony with Ernest's spiritual development, but one who should see in the setting nothing more than this would lose much of what the legend is intended to convey. Similarly, the passage from Dickens would lose much, if not all, of its significance were the reader to

view it as nothing more than a rather picturesque piece of descriptive writing.

It is evident, then, that setting is auxiliary to action, to the ordering of details that constitute the backbone of the narrative. The only exception would seem to be in those cases where the environment demands a certain harmonious and concurrent action. Yet even here the story is ultimately the thing.

### Undue Elaboration of Setting

Description, apart and unsubordinated, is recognized as an entirely legitimate form of prose discourse, but it cannot be termed background unless upon it something is enacted. Descriptive writing cast into the body of a narrative may be defended in proportion as it is an inherent part of the whole composition. When it begins to take form as an independent entity, the composition as a narrative whole at once begins to suffer from lack of unity, coherence, and emphasis. Narrative unity is violated because there is no longer essential consonance between the action—without which there can be no narration—and the background of the action; the two do not coalesce. Narrative coherence suffers because the general current of events is disturbed by the interpolation of what seems foreign matter. And narrative emphasis is lost because, through want of true proportion, the subordinate is advanced into equal prominence with that which is not its rhetorical equal.

Undue elaboration of setting is likely to manifest itself in one of two ways: (a) the writer overcrowds his setting with unnecessary details; or (b) he indulges in descriptive dissipation without regard to the main function of the composition.

A tendency of young writers — and indeed of older writers not possessed of well-developed power of selection — is to overcrowd the scene with details that are trivial or that leave too little to the reader's imagination. Arlo Bates in his *Talks on Writing English* illustrates the first of these tendencies in the following passage: —

To force the accidental on the reader is to destroy the sense of reality, which is the prime object of the literary artist. As an illustration we may take this passage from Thackeray: —

"If your Majesty will please to enter the next apartment," says Esmond, preserving his grave tone, "I have some papers there which I would gladly submit to you, and by your permission, I will lead the way;" and taking the taper up, and backing before the Prince with very great ceremony, Mr. Esmond passed in to the little Chaplain's room, through which we had just entered into the house. "Please to set a chair for his Majesty, Frank," says the Colonel to his companion, who wondered much at this scene, and was as much puzzled by it as the other actor in it. Then going to the crypt over the mantelpiece, the Colonel opened it, and drew thence the papers which had so long lain there. — *The History of Henry Esmond*.

This might have been written, with more literal exactness: —

"If your Majesty will please to enter the next apartment," says Esmond, preserving his grave tone, resting his hand on the back of a chair, and bowing as he spoke, "I have some papers there which I would gladly submit to you; and by your permission I will lead the way." He stepped forward a couple of paces. He took up the taper, bowing again, and backed before the Prince with great ceremony, toward the door of the little Chaplain's room, through which we had just entered the house. He glanced under his arm as he bowed to see the threshold, lest he should stumble and destroy the dignity of his

march. The Prince followed slowly, regarding the other with a look at once of rage and stupefaction. His coat, which he had put on unassisted, was all awry, his wig tumbled, and his ribbons rumped. He rested his hand upon the hilt of a dagger which he wore at his belt, and he carried his head with a manner almost openly defiant. Behind him came Frank, most astonished of all, but following the lead which the Colonel gave. His steps were longer than those of the Prince, and once he had to stop to let his Majesty get farther ahead of him, etc.

There is nothing here which might not have belonged to the real scene, but the stupid piling up of details has so blurred the outlines that the whole effect is spoiled.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing example illustrates in large degree the over-elaboration of details of action, but that the principle holds equally well of the descriptive details in setting will be apparent if one will revert to the grindstone scene in *A Tale of Two Cities* alluded to on p. 16. The paragraph following the scene of mad riot in the tavern yard states that

All this was seen in a moment, as the vision of a drowning man, or of any human creature at any very great pass, could see in a world if it were there.

This conception is sustained by the details presented. Only two out of the entire mob of forty or fifty frenzied savages appear with individual distinctness; the rest are described in general terms:—

. . . *Some women* held wine to their mouths that they might drink.

. . . Shouldering one another to get next at the sharpening stone were *men* stripped to the waist, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Arlo Bates's *Talks on Writing English (Second Series)*, pp. 196-197. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

One sees them all as a howling, shrieking, maddened crew, not as individuals picked out with photographic distinctness. In this unconscious selection of the telling details and in the omission of a thousand other details that he might have included, Dickens shows his artistic sense and incidentally succeeds in presenting the scene with infinitely greater effect. The dramatic loss will at once become apparent if after the picture of the two ruffians at the stone one inserts additional details in this manner: —

. . . And what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with the stream of sparks struck out of the stone, all their wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire. Standing in a doorway of rough stone just below the window-ledge and some eight or ten feet to the right, Mr. Lorry observed a striking figure. It was that of a stout woman, perhaps thirty years of age, with a watchful eye, a large hand heavily ringed, a steady face, strong features, and great composure of manner. A quantity of bright shawl was twined about her head, though not to the concealment of two large ear-rings. Her right elbow sustained by her left hand, she silently watched the scene by the grindstone. Save for this one figure, the eye could not detect one creature in the group free from the smear of blood. Etc., etc. . . .

This does not improve the picture. Although these very details serve their purpose elsewhere in the story, their insertion at this point seriously affects the vividness of the scene. It becomes a mere snap-shot, omitting nothing within the range of vision. But snap-shots, however exact, are not generally recognized as the highest form of art. Artistic description seeks the most suggestive details, — details that shall suggest what is intended and yet leave some freedom to the reader's individual imagination. One will designedly omit prominent details

if by so doing he can better produce the desired effect. Eden Phillpotts recognizes this principle in the following passage: —

“A gentleman stopped in our best bedroom and parlour a year back,” continued Simon, “and his custom was to paint pickshers. And once I comed this way and he was painting pretty near where we be standing now. And I made so bold as to look, and then I made so bold as to talk, because the gentleman axed me what I thought of it. ‘You’ve left out the church tower,’ I says to him. ‘Yes,’ he says, ‘t was n’t like I was going to stick such a beastly, ugly thing as that in the midst of they hills.’ So he left it out, though to my eye ’t was the most interesting sight to be seen.”

“Did he make his pickshers for pleasure, or did he get anything by them?” asked Rhoda.

“He lived by ’em. He said to me once that there were one or two sane men in the world who bought everything he liked to paint. ’T was a very curious speech to my ear. And to be honest with you, I did n’t like his pickshers — and half done to my eye — very different to the pickshers you see on grocers’ almanacs, where everything, to the hairs on a horse’s tail, be worked out to a miracle.<sup>1</sup>

The artist selects only those details that contribute to his purpose; the compiler of the almanac includes everything.

Among recent writers of fiction Frank Norris is noted for his realistic descriptive power; but the reader is sometimes impelled to feel that details are unduly multiplied. A typical passage is the well-known picture of the Wheat Pit of the Board of Trade as presented at the close of chapter III in *The Pit*. Vivid, photographic to the last degree, the scene certainly is, but one may ask

<sup>1</sup> Phillpotts’s *The Virgin in Judgment*. By permission of Moffat, Yard, and Company.

whether less exactness and slightly freer play for the imagination might not contribute added effectiveness.

This question of selection and omission is, in a sense, but a corollary to the larger theme of romantic and realistic description. These are broad terms, and can be discussed at length only in an exhaustive consideration of description as a form of discourse. But, without going too deeply into the matter, we may note that the character of the narrative will in large degree determine the character of the details to be chosen by the artist. In general, the romantic writer is principally concerned with artistic fitness. He strives to present with the greatest possible effectiveness the characters and the action of his narrative. His own personality, the subjective element, will, to a greater or less extent, permeate his setting. His inventiveness, his imagination, will be called into play, and although his background may be no more actual than the Forest of Arden, and although he may depart widely from the verified observations set down in the geographies, yet it will serve an artistic purpose and will be essentially true. In realistic writing, on the other hand, as seen in the citation from Norris the artist seeks verisimilitude, truth to actuality. His attitude to his work becomes less subjective, and more objective. But whether, in romantic mood, the writer uses subjective description to secure fit setting for his narrative, or whether he writes with realistic adherence to actual observation, he is bound by the principles of due selection and omission as already set forth. For the time being, the scene must carry conviction. Whether the reader stands before the bleak walls of the melancholy House of Usher or looks down upon the shattering chaos of the Wheat Pit in Chicago, he must for the moment realize the essential truth of the picture before him.

The undue multiplication of descriptive details merges into the second fault of exaggerated setting (see p. 90) — the use of description for its own sake. Artistic description sometimes tempts the artist too far afield, and the composition loses entirely its original character. The sketch and the picturesque narrative, indeed, have their place, but the chronicler, as narration is his purpose, should exercise care that he does not forget that purpose in the intoxication of descriptive elaboration. If description be the end in view, then — as has already been explained (p. 14) — the device of narrative description is at one's disposal, but the end in that case is to present a picture, not to chronicle the details of an occurrence. It would sometimes seem that Dickens carries too far his fondness for descriptive writing, and his pictures, wonderful indeed in their vividness, retard the progress of the narrative. In many cases the extended descriptive passages serve a distinct purpose in creating an atmosphere for the events that are chronicled, as in the well-known "good-humoured Christmas chapter" of *Pickwick Papers*; but, on the other hand, the opening chapter of *Bleak House* may be open to some criticism as suggesting description merely for its own sake and indicating temporary forgetfulness of the main action. Again, one is disposed to challenge the picture of the boisterous wind and the flying leaves in chapter II of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The realism of the scene cannot be disputed; many an admirer of Dickens has read it again and again with delight. But what is its narrative purpose? How does it advance the action or in any degree render it more effective? It seems to serve no greater purpose than to slam the street door in Mr. Pecksniff's face and to knock that gentleman down his own front steps. And if this be all, one may well ask if



the author is justified in the elaboration of a scene of three or four paragraphs for so trivial an end.

The following undergraduate sketch, entitled "The Priest," is an example of composition wherein one is justified in making description the principal form of discourse, for the purpose is frankly to present a picture and nothing more. The narrative mould is merely incidental. The writer has chosen narrative description as the most effective means of accomplishing his artistic purpose.

'T was one of those bright warm days in midsummer when the busy farmer folk had deserted the village for the hay-fields, and there was left about the grocery store only a crippled loafer, and upon the village green but a few sleepy summer boarders in their easy chairs.

Bill Russell and I lay in the cool shade of a maple, blowing rings of tobacco smoke in the still air, lazily gazing at the occasional passer-by, and wondering what business he had to move on such a day. A grocery wagon rattled by, and the dust behind it settled back into the wagon tracks without being wafted even to the ditches. Then, like a big, lumbering elephant, a load of hay crawled by, gently reminding us that beyond the sleepy village there were busy times. But some fishermen returning early from the lake told us that even for fishing the day was too bright and still.

So we lay there in the shade, and for some time no one passed. Then from down the road we heard the rapid "chug, chug" of a pacer beating the dust, and there dashed into sight a lathered horse and a buggy, too light, it seemed, for the corpulent man who spread himself all over the seat. In his mouth was a fat cigar, the smoke from which had to roll quite around the broad spongy face before mingling with the dust behind. As he came nearer he took the cigar between his short, fat fingers, and with the air of a connoisseur flicked off the ashes with his little finger, at the same time heaving a guttural cough

which caused the breast of his linen duster to rise and fall like a bellows, and loosened the damp handkerchief which was about his collar.

"He's the strangest looking horse-doctor I've seen in this township," I remarked to Bill.

"Then you're not very well acquainted hereabouts," suggested Bill laughing.

"He reminds me of that old boozier, the priest Rudiman in Scheffel's *Ekkehard*," I added.

Bill smiled, but kept a discreet silence.

Hardly five minutes had elapsed when the same rig came down the street again.

"What in ——! Who are those people with him?" I exclaimed, for beside my horse-doctor was the Catholic priest of the town, a pleasant-faced gentleman, in a purely clerical dress, and, perched between the two men, seated on a knee of each, was a nun. She was smiling beneath her hood, and the men were exchanging pleasantries as they drove by us; and when they had passed I could see the horse-doctor, his linen duster pressed snugly against the bars of the lowered buggy-top, he himself shaking with laughter.

With an astonished look I turned to Bill, whom I saw snickering to himself.

"Who is that fellow, anyway?" I inquired.

"Why, your horse-doctor is the visiting priest of the county," was the reply.

One fault often found in connection with over-elaboration of setting is artificial appeal to the emotions, — that is, appeal based on no sincere feeling on the writer's part. In the well-known chapter in *Modern Painters*, in which he expounds what he calls the "pathetic fallacy," Ruskin discusses this phase of literary insincerity. He enlarges upon the excited state of the feelings, under the influence of which a writer, for the time being blinded to realities, becomes more or less irrational and thinks

in metaphors. This illogical frame of mind is common among writers of highly emotional temperament; the works of the poets, for example, abound in conceits that emanate from highly wrought — although thoroughly sincere — imaginative faculties. But it is no uncommon thing to meet with passages characterized by insincere emotion; burning words abound, indeed, but there is no soul in them. One finds all the outward trappings of woe, of elation, of despair; yet the spirit remains chill, all seems studied and artificial. If artistic setting is to be effective it must be sincere; mere multiplication of words and of figures of speech does not constitute effective description. Ruskin, indeed, would seem to maintain that the manifestation of deep emotion through figurative speech betrays weakness, showing that a writer's imagination has mastered his powers of seeing truly, and thus has precluded him from taking rank with the really great ones in literature. But even worse, he says, are those in whose work fanciful, metaphorical "expressions are not ignorantly and fearlessly caught up, but, by some master, skilful in handling, yet insincere, deliberately wrought out with chill and studied fancy; as if we should try to make an old lava stream look red-hot again, by covering it with dead leaves, or white-hot, with hoar frost."

It is this deliberate and studied attempt to imitate true emotion that often gives to the conventional undergraduate story an atmosphere of mawkish sentimentality or of vain rant. The young writer, feeling no true sympathy with the scene that he strives to picture, yet realizing the effectiveness that belongs to emotion well rendered, presses remote metaphors and similes into his service and strains his fancy to the breaking-point. The result is superficiality, exaggeration, bathos. Passages like the following illustrate the effect: —

"He whirled her away from the lingering crowd of men. They were the first to glide out upon the smooth yellow floor. Out into the lights they waltzed; out into the festooned room; under the sweeping wreaths of evergreen; through the sweet, pungent perfume of freshly cut pine. The spell of measured music floated over the room, as from generations of the past and of the future, the passion of rhythm played upon their hearts and swept like some mystic love note into their souls, setting them atune. Across the hall of dazzling light, gently waving as in the hot Trade Winds from the Orient, the umbrella palms were inviting seclusion. Behind them the bitter wind tore at the window," etc., etc.

"But no trace of his confusion was visible in his face as he again, on this wintry evening, confronted Dorothy. She was more than pretty to-night, — in her simple and home-like way, she was beautiful. A single white rosebud vaunted itself in her wavy dark brown hair. Her guileless blue eyes were the soul of intoxicating humor; the deep red of her lips put to shame the faint pinkness of her dress," etc., etc.

"He then mumbled about an old sweetheart of his, who had rejected him; of the 'boys,' — those 'friends' who had remained faithful to him only as long as his money had lasted. Suddenly, as quickly as the crack of the ring-master's whip, his countenance changed. The very muscles of his face seemed to stand out in his intense agony, that agony which only those can feel who have tasted of that bitterest cup of pain — despair. I had never before understood how it was possible to weep without a movement of the muscles. I understood then. This man was weeping, — but down in the depths of his soul. As I gazed upon his face, I saw that it was scarred; the forehead was furrowed with deep wrinkles, and, although he looked as if he were under thirty years of age, his hair in spots was a pronounced gray. But despite his repulsive physiognomy, there was something in that face that showed that he had a warm, true heart wrapped in the rags that he called

clothes. I really pitied the fellow. What joy was left to him? Even the tiny violet, the first to bloom of all flowers, shyly peeping above the ground and heralding the summer and its wealth of beauty and sunshine, told him only that the hot rays of the midsummer-sun, beating upon him from above and refracted from the scorching highway beneath, would cause him to swelter and curse himself, his fellow-men, and perhaps even his Creator!"

### Development of Setting in Narrative Writing

The elaboration of setting as an element in narrative writing is a matter of comparatively recent growth. In early literature narration was confined to the one purpose of chronicling events, and descriptive details were at best barely suggested. The value of effective background was not yet appreciated. In *Materials and Methods of Fiction*<sup>1</sup> Mr. Clayton Hamilton has drawn a somewhat detailed comparison between the development of background in figure-painting and of setting in literature. In the evolution of figure-painting there have been, he tells us, three stages. In the first of these background plays no essential part. If it is present at all, it is insignificant, and the figures themselves are the sole concern of the artist. In the second stage, represented by the great Italian artists at the period of their full maturity, background begins to assume a place of some importance. But its function is purely decorative; whether of color or of line it has no basis in realism, but is purely a conventional device. Finally, in the third stage, background stands in definite relation to the figures that are projected upon it. Each is in keeping with the other, and each gives effect to the other. "The Angelus' is neither figure-painting nor landscape-paint-

<sup>1</sup> Chap. vi.

ing merely; it is both." In narrative writing there has been a similar evolution from the absence of all setting to full harmony between setting and action.

The advance from simple enumeration to elaborated narrative is apparent if we compare a passage from one of the old chroniclers with the work of a modern historian. Of the old chroniclers Taine writes: —

They spun out awkwardly and heavily dry chronicles, a sort of historical almanac. You might think them peasants, who, returning from their toil, came and scribbled with chalk on a smoky table the date of a year of scarcity, the price of corn, the change in the weather, a death.

As examples of their method he cites the following: —

A.D. 611. This year Cynegils succeeded to the government in Wessex, and held it one-and-thirty winters. Cynegils was the son of Ceol, Ceol of Cutha, Cutha of Cynric.

614. This year Cynegils and Cnichelm fought at Bampton, and slew two thousand and forty-six of the Welsh.

678. This year appeared the comet-star in August, and shone every morning during three months like a sunbeam. Bishop Wilfrid being driven from his bishopric by King Everth, two bishops were consecrated in his stead.

1077. This year were reconciled the King of the Franks, and William, King of England. But it continued only a little while. This year was London burned, one night before the Assumption of St. Mary, so terribly as it never was before it was built.

Compare with the foregoing the well-known passage of Macaulay regarding the trial of Warren Hastings in Westminster Hall. The difference between the two compositions is not simply the difference between eleventh- and nineteenth-century prose; it is a difference between methods; between satisfaction with the bare

elements of narrative, with the meagre indication of the occurrence or transaction, and appreciative grasp of all the attendant pomp and historic association that rendered Westminster Hall a most effective setting for the dramatic circumstances attending the trial of Hastings. One of the old chroniclers would have been satisfied with an entry after this order, —

A.D. 1788. This year Charles the Fourth succeeded to the Throne of Spain. This year Warren Hastings was impeached.

—and would have hurried on to an eclipse or a famine or a pestilence that made its appearance during the same year. And the contrast becomes the more striking when one remembers that the bare chronicle was composed amid all the leisure of monastery *régime*, when elaboration would have been easy had it been the literary fashion; whereas the more highly picturesque style belongs to a day of less leisure and of fuller appreciation of the value of historic fact.

In fiction, where there is stronger appeal to the imagination than in the history of actual occurrences, the stages that Mr. Hamilton has traced in the evolution of figure-painting can be followed in greater detail. From the very fact that fiction approaches less closely to exposition than does history and is, in consequence, more imaginative and less intellectual in its appeal, we are more likely to find in fiction fuller development of the various devices for securing dramatic effect. The following modernized rendering of a mediæval short-story is illustrative of the first stage, of the mere chronicle in which action is everything and setting plays no part: —

A young man late married to a wife thought it was good policy to get the mastery of her in the beginning. The pot

boiling over, although the meat was not done, he suddenly commanded her to take the pot from the fire. But she replied that the meat was not ready to eat. And he said, "I will have it taken off because it is my pleasure." The woman, loath to offend him, set the pot beside the fire as he bade. And he commanded her to set the pot behind the door, and she replied, "You are not wise to do this." But he insisted that it should be as he ordered. And again she gently did as he bade. The man, not yet satisfied, ordered her to set the pot high up on the hen roost. "But," quoth his wife, "I believe you are mad." And he then fiercely ordered her to set it there or she should repent. She, somewhat fearful of arousing his temper, took a ladder and set it against the roost and went herself up the ladder and took the pot in her hands, praying her husband to hold the ladder fast lest it should slip, which he did.

And when her husband looked up and saw the pot standing there on high he spoke thus: "Lo, there stands the pot where I would have it." His wife hearing this, suddenly poured the hot pottage on his head and said thus: "And there is the pottage where I would have it." <sup>1</sup>

In the second stage of its development we find background merely as an artistic decoration, serving no distinctly dramatic purpose in connection with the action. Such setting appears in the work of the pastoral poets and novelists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries like Spenser, Sidney, and Lodge, writers whose work abounds in descriptive passages that add nothing essential to the effectiveness of the plot action. Later, in the sentimental efforts of the eighteenth-century novelists, abundant illustrations of this stage appear. The following are typical: —

I gained the eastern extremity of the ridge, that I might the more amply enjoy the beams of the setting sun as he sunk

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Early English Prose Romances*. By permission of Messrs. E. P. Dutton and Company.



beneath the waves of the Irish Sea. It was the finest evening my eyes ever beheld. The resplendent colours of the clouds, the rich purple and burnished gold in various streaks fantastically formed and repeated, were beyond any imagination to conceive. The woods were vocal. The scents that surrounded me, the steaming earth, the fresh and invigorating air, the hay and the flowers, constituted, so to express myself, an olfactory concert infinitely more ravishing than all the concords of harmonious sound art ever produced. This lonely moment combined in one impression the freshness of the finest morning, with all the rich and gorgeous effects peculiar to the close of a summer's day.<sup>1</sup>

It was now the second watch of the night. . . . Emily heard the passing steps of the sentinels on the rampart, as they changed guard; and, when all was again silent, she took her station at the casement, leaving her lamp in a remote part of the chamber, that she might escape notice from without. The moon gave a faint and uncertain light, for heavy vapours surrounded it, and, after rolling over the disk, left the scene below in total darkness. . . . Sometimes a cloud opened its light upon a distant mountain, and, while the sudden splendour illumined all its recesses of rock and wood, the rest of the scene remained in deep shadow: at others, partial features of the castle were revealed by the glimpse — the ancient arch leading to the east rampart, the turret above, or the fortifications beyond; and then, perhaps, the whole edifice, with all its towers, its dark, massy walls, and pointed casements, would appear and vanish in an instant.<sup>2</sup>

If the elaborated but artificial pictures of this order serve any dramatic purpose in heightening the effect of the action, it is of the slightest. "Snowy mountain summits tinged with roseate hues," "deep volleys of

<sup>1</sup> William Godwin: *Fleetwood*.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Radcliffe: *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

rolling thunder and the flashing of livid lightning," "glimpses of ruined watch-towers standing on points of rock and rising from among the tufted foliage,"—all such details impart a certain air of romance, but they contribute none of the effectiveness and unity of background and action that we find, for example, in the works of George Eliot or of Stevenson. The novelists of Godwin's time had gone more or less mad after Nature and the "simple life." Their frequent indulgence in romantic landscape painting was inspired largely by the same influences that led Coleridge and Southey to dream of a "pantisocracy" in the wilds of the American forest, and tempted certain apparently sane fathers and mothers to bring up their children after the manner of savages, in order that being thus "natural" they might be free from the artificialities of social intercourse.

But with the perfection of the English novel that appeared in the next literary generation there came a much fuller appreciation of the value of setting as auxiliary to plot. From Scott and his contemporaries down to the novelists of our own time we find abundant illustration of the various devices to which the present chapter has called attention and which have rendered more dramatic, forceful, and effective the main incidents of the narrative.

## CHAPTER V

### THE AGENT OF THE ACTION: CHARACTER

WHEN one reads a complete narrative, the first interest usually centres in the significance of the details that constitute the action. For example, in Bret Harte's *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* the first concern will be with the fortunes of the little band snowbound amid the mountains between Poker Flat and Sandy Bar. But after curiosity as to their fate has been satisfied, the appeal that induces one to read the narrative a second time is something deeper than mere curiosity. This residuum of interest in many cases proceeds from beauty of setting, from effective portrayal of nature. But in *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, although setting plays considerable part in the narrative, it can hardly be called the ultimate source of charm. That is to be found in the portraiture of human personalities, revolting perhaps at first acquaintance, but, amid peril and starvation, rising to the level of the heroic. The ultimate power of the narrative will probably centre in the delineation of the actors rather than in the action or in the background; that is, not so much in plot or setting as in character.

#### DEFINITION OF "CHARACTER"

In discussing this personal element in narrative writing, it is necessary at the outset to note two senses in which the word "character" is used. It may have reference to the actors externally, objectively, as mere *personages*; or it may convey the deeper internal significance of

*personality*. For instance, in *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* Uncle Billy is introduced as "a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard." This identifies him as one of the *dramatis personæ*; it classifies him externally. But it cannot be said to individualize him, to distinguish him from others of his type, any more than Dickens's epithets individualize some of his creations, — for example, "the stranger," "the scientific gentleman," "the man with the horrible face." Later in the story, however, on the morning after Tom's and Piney's arrival, when Oakhurst awakes benumbed with the cold and is appalled to find snow falling, we read: —

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But, turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered; they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

These sentences characterize Uncle Billy more deeply, individualize him far more accurately, than do the terms "suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard." As a robber and drunkard he is a mere personage, distinguished indeed from the other personages of the narrative; but, as an individual, essentially himself, he is a man who not only will desert his companions, but, in order to elude pursuit and preserve his own skin, will deprive them of every chance of securing their own escape from peril. Uncle Billy, in this sense, is a personality, a character despicable and cowardly.

The following passages, selected from George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, present good illustration of the two methods of character presentation. In the first, the reader sees Adam Bede, a muscular, broad-chested young carpen-

ter, working at his bench; he is simply one of five workmen who occupy the stage at the beginning of the narrative. Of his personality, of the individual traits that differentiate him from his companions, we know nothing save what we may infer from the general intelligence and manliness evidenced in his appearance as he stands in the workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge one June morning.

(a) The afternoon sun was warm on the five workmen there, busy upon doors and window-frames and wainscoting. A scent of pine-wood from a tent-like pile of planks outside the open door mingled itself with the scent of the elder-bushes which were spreading their summer snow close to the open window opposite; the slanting sunbeams shone through the transparent shavings that flew before the steady plane, and lit up the fine grain of the oak panelling which stood propped against the wall. On a heap of those soft shavings a rough gray shepherd-dog had made himself a pleasant bed, and was lying with his nose between his fore-paws, occasionally wrinkling his brows to cast a glance at the tallest of the five workmen, who was carving a shield in the centre of a wooden mantel-piece. It was to this workman that the strong barytone voice belonged which was heard above the sound of plane and hammer singing —

“Awake my soul, and with the sun  
Thy daily stage of duty run;  
Shake off dull sloth. . . .”

Here some measurement was to be taken which required more concentrated attention, and the sonorous voice subsided into a low whistle; but it presently broke out again with renewed vigor —

“Let all thy converse be sincere,  
Thy conscience as the noonday clear.”

Such a voice could only come from a broad chest, and the broad chest belonged to a large-boned muscular man nearly six feet

high, with a back so flat and a head so well poised that when he drew himself up to take a more distant survey of his work, he had the air of a soldier standing at ease. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that was likely to win the prize for feats of strength; yet the long supple hand, with its broad finger-tips, looked ready for works of skill. In his tall stalwartness Adam Bede was a Saxon, and justified the name; but the jet-black hair, made the more noticeable by its contrast with the light paper cap, and the keen glance of the dark eyes that shone from under strongly marked, prominent and mobile eyebrows, indicated a mixture of Celtic blood. The face was large and roughly hewn, and when in repose had no other beauty than such as belongs to an expression of good-humored honest intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

In the second passage (*b*) we have no longer the objective picture of the stalwart young workingman; rather we penetrate the veil of Adam's personality, and see him as he is — deferential to his superiors in rank, but ever thoroughly self-respecting, and ready, if need be, to abide by his own judgment. We have internal portraiture, the exposition of an individuality.

(*b*) Adam, I confess, was very susceptible to the influence of rank, and quite ready to give an extra amount of respect to every one who had more advantages than himself, not being a philosopher, or a proletaire with democratic ideas, but simply a stout-limbed carpenter with a large fund of reverence in his nature, which inclined him to admit all established claims unless he saw very clear grounds for questioning them. He had no theories about setting the world to rights, but he saw there was a great deal of damage done by building with ill-seasoned timber — by ignorant men in fine clothes making plans for out-houses and workshops and the like, without knowing the bearings of things — by slovenly joiners' work, and by hasty contracts that could never be fulfilled without ruining somebody;

<sup>1</sup> Chap. I.

and he resolved, for his part, to set his face against such doings. On these points he would have maintained his opinion against the largest landed proprietor in Loamshire or Stonyshire either; but he felt that beyond these it would be better for him to defer to people who were more knowing than himself. He saw as plainly as possible how ill the woods on the estate were managed, and the shameful state of the farm-buildings; and if old Squire Donnithorne had asked him the effect of this mismanagement, he would have spoken his opinion without flinching, but the influence to a respectful demeanor towards a "gentleman" would have been strong within him all the while. The word "gentleman" had a spell for Adam, and, as he often said, he "could n't abide a fellow who thought he made himself fine by being coxy to his betters." I must remind you again that Adam had the blood of the peasant in his veins, and that since he was in his prime half a century ago, you must expect some of his characteristics to be obsolete.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident, then, that in the sense of "personage" the word "character" in narrative writing is more superficial and external than when used in the sense of "personality." As mere personages, the actors serve much the same purpose as does setting, in that they are auxiliary to the action, and do not arouse interest in and of themselves. This becomes clear if one examines an extreme case of objective narration like *Robinson Crusoe*. If from this story of adventure we could subtract everything that elucidates Crusoe's individuality, everything that differentiates him as an emotional, thinking unit from the rest of humankind, the volume of the book would not be essentially diminished. Our main interest lies in his escape from the Moors, in the salvage of necessities from the wreck, in the construction of the "castle," in the rescue of Friday from the cannibals, etc. We are

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xvi.

stirred by what Crusoe *does*. In contrast with this, however, were one to dissect out from Meredith's *The Egoist* all those passages that by subtle analysis expound the character of Sir Willoughby Patterne, the residue would be surprisingly small, for the element of actual adventure in this novel is scant indeed. The reader is interested not so much in what Sir Willoughby *does* as in what he *is*.

Briefer illustration of the same difference would be found by comparing a short-story like Poe's *The Gold Bug* with Hawthorne's *The Great Stone Face*. In the one case, Legrand, Jupiter, and the supposed narrator are of no consequence, save as necessary adjuncts to an action of absorbing interest. But in Hawthorne's narrative, Gathergold, Stony Phiz, and old Blood-and-Thunder serve the sole purpose of contributing to the elaboration of Ernest's personality, — the main concern of the narrative.

Between these two extremes lies the great part of narrative writing. While many novels, stories, and narrative sketches are written primarily to present in entertaining manner some occurrence or transaction, yet the human element will creep in, until often it is difficult to say which is more essential, the sequence of details — wherein the human element is purely adventitious — or personality for its own sake. What gives *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* its value? Is it the originality of narrative detail in which Oakhurst, Mother Shipton, and "The Duchess" are mere personages? Or is it the delineation of these very personages as individuals, human in their appeal? The tendency of narrative fiction has been distinctly toward increased elaboration of the character element. The early romances dealt more exclusively with incidents; writing of them Professor Horne says: —

•



Writers of romance made their heroes all alike and their old men all alike. . . . As to character development, the change caused in the person by the experiences undergone in the tale, it was still wholly unconsidered.<sup>1</sup>

The modern novel, on the other hand, concerns itself more and more with psychological problems, with the personality of the actors. Scott and Stevenson will of course always be popular, nevertheless George Eliot and George Meredith are more truly representative of the trend of modern imaginative narrative than are the authors of *Kenilworth* and *Treasure Island*.

Outside of fiction, narrative writing will verge toward the one or the other method, as the subject ranges from the chronicle of historic events to the interpretative biography. In the history of a nation or of a period the main concern of the narrator is to present the successive data that distinguish the era under consideration. Yet even in the setting forth of these data it is often inevitable that he present the individuality of the men who have shaped national destiny. The character of a Washington, of a Napoleon, of a Cromwell, is so essentially interwoven with the great events of his time that it is almost impossible to conceive of him as a mere doer of deeds. Of course in biographic writing the very character of the discourse demands the exposition of personality. The writer will not only give his own interpretation of his hero as an individual, but he will know that the events chronicled are subordinate in interest to that personality.

<sup>1</sup> Horne's *The Technique of the Novel*. By permission of Harper and Brothers. Copyright, 1908, by Harper and Brothers.

## DIRECT CHARACTERIZATION

Portrayal of character in the sense of personality, in that it deals with the abstract, differs entirely from the presentation of a personage and from setting, which have to do with the concrete. The presentation of that impalpable, abstract thing that we call individuality may be accomplished in either of two ways, the direct or the indirect. In the direct method of characterization the writer uses exposition, and presents the various phases of his subject with all the exactness that would attend the definition of a term. For the time being, he is no longer the narrator; he becomes the teacher. In *The Scarlet Letter* for example, one frequently finds paragraphs like the following, which sets forth the character of Hester Prynne: —

Much of the marble coldness of Hester's impression was to be attributed to the circumstance that her life had turned, in great measure, from passion and feeling to thought. Standing alone in the world — alone, as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected — alone, and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable — she cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world's law was no law to her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before. Men of the world had overthrown nobles and kings. Men bolder than these had overthrown and rearranged — not actually, but within the sphere of theory, which was their most real abode — the whole system of ancient prejudice, where-with was linked much of ancient principle. Hester Prynne imbibed this spirit. She assumed a freedom of speculation, then common enough on the other side of the Atlantic, but which our forefathers, had they known it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter.

In her lonesome cottage, by the sea-shore, thoughts visited her such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been as perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been seen so much as knocking at her door.

The dangers attendant upon this direct, or abstract, method of characterization, whether in the chronicle of fact or in fiction, are apparent at a glance. Essentially expository in nature, it is not structurally of a piece with the writing of which it is a part, and is likely, therefore, to introduce an atmosphere of stiffness, of artificiality, that may prove fatal to unity of tone as well as to general coherence and to interest. This is especially true if the exposition be carried to excess, as may easily be done by a writer endowed, like George Eliot, with a taste for analytical and logical methods. Writers of this order, exponents of the scientific tendencies characteristic of the Victorian age, have given to recent fiction a distinctly analytical cast.

A modification of the direct method of characterization — a modification in form rather than in substance — is seen when the writer, instead of appearing in person to expound the personality of his hero, puts the exposition into the mouth of some actor in the story, — either the hero himself or some subordinate personage. Under these conditions the exposition seems to arise more naturally from the narrative. For example, in *Adam Bede*, Dinah Morris is made to expound her own character when, in conversation with Mr. Irwine, in reply to the question how she first came to think of preaching, she replies: —

“Indeed, sir, I did n’t think of it at all — I ’d been used from the time I was sixteen to talk to the little children, and teach them, and sometimes I had had my heart enlarged to speak in

class, and was much drawn out in prayer with the sick. But I had felt no call to preach; for when I 'm not greatly wrought upon, I 'm too much given to sit silent all day long with the thought of God overflowing my soul — as the pebbles lie bathed in the Willow Brook. For thoughts are so great — are n't they, sir? They seem to lie upon us like a deep flood; and it's my besetment to forget where I am and everything about me, and lose myself in thoughts that I could give no account of, for I could neither make a beginning nor ending of them in words. That was my way as long as I can remember; but sometimes it seemed as if speech came to me without any will of my own, and words were given to me that came out as the tears come, because our hearts are full and we can't help it. And those were always times of great blessing, though I had never thought it could be so with me before a congregation of people. But, sir, we are led on, like the little children, by a way that we know not. I was called to preach quite suddenly, and since then I have never been left in doubt about the work that was laid upon me."

This is, however, but a shading of the frankly direct method, and is open to the rhetorical dangers already indicated, although in slightly less degree. It is, furthermore, subject to the danger of causing the personage through whom the exposition is presented to become dull and artificial.

### INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION

Direct, or abstract, characterization is of the simplest order and easily accomplished, for nothing is less difficult than to bring the story to a halt for a time and to fill paragraph after paragraph with expository comment upon the characters that participate in the action. But this is not the method of actual experience. One does not form judgment of a friend, of an acquaintance,

of some great personage, from formal generalizations as to his distinctive traits, or altogether from what others may say of him, or from what he says of himself. Rather are men known by their acts, by the external expression of the soul within. We may read in abstract terms that Queen Elizabeth possessed the "triviality of Anne Boleyn" and "the wilfulness of Henry," together with "a nature as hard as steel and a temper purely intellectual"; but her statesmen formulated no such abstractions. The Queen known to them was the woman who "played with her rings that her courtiers might note the delicacy of her hands," who "danced a coranto that the French ambassador hidden dexterously behind a screen might report her sprightliness to his master," who "for fifty years hoodwinked and outwitted every statesman in Europe by her diplomacy and shrewd intrigue." Similarly in narrative writing, the natural method of characterization is that whereby individuality is indirectly set forth by words, by acts, or by personal characteristics of gesture and speech. There is hardly a narrative, from the simplest to the most complex, that does not illustrate this indirect, or concrete, method of delineation. A simple item to the effect that "a mob about to lynch a horse-thief gave him a good drink of whiskey before stringing him up" suggests to the author of *The American Commonwealth* a distinct trait in the American character. The simple outline of the story of the Prodigal Son has supplied homiletic ammunition to generations of sermon writers, until, were all the characterizations of the father, the prodigal, and the older brother collated, they would constitute a library of psychologic interpretation. In Bret Harte's *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* the reader feels vividly the delicacy of John Oakhurst, a gambler and sharper; the fundamental wo-

manliness of "The Duchess," an ostracized prostitute; the boyish simplicity and enthusiasm of "The Innocent"; but the story contains no paragraphs of extended analytical character dissection. *The Dolly Dialogues* of Anthony Hope, in keeping with their title, present nothing but dialogue, and yet from them one obtains a fairly clear conception of the personality of Miss Foster and of Lady Mickleham. The extended forms of narrative literature offer endless illustrations of the principle that personality is portrayed by all forms of external manifestation. It is interesting to note how in a passage like the following from Macaulay's *History of England*, along with the direct characterization, there is considerable of the indirect method. The final estimate of Clarendon is based, in no small degree, upon such premises as his arrogance, his ostentation, his attitude on the religious and political matters of his own time, — all of these data being viewed as external manifestations of the personality within: —

The minister's virtues and vices alike contributed to his ruin. He was the ostensible head of the administration, and was therefore held responsible even for those acts which he had strongly but vainly opposed in Council. He was regarded by the Puritans, and by all who pitied him, as an implacable bigot, a second Laud, with much more than Laud's understanding. He had on all occasions maintained that the Act of Indemnity ought to be strictly observed; and this part of his conduct, though highly honorable to him, made him hateful to all those Royalists who wished to repair their ruined fortunes by suing the Roundheads for damages and mesne profits. The Presbyterians of Scotland attributed to him the downfall of their Church. The Papists of Ireland attributed to him the loss of their lands. As father of the Duchess of York, he had an obvious motive for wishing that there might be a barren queen; and he was therefore suspected of having purposely recommended one. The sale of Dunkirk was justly imputed to him.

For the war with Holland, he was, with less justice, held accountable. His hot temper, his arrogant deportment, the indelicate eagerness with which he grasped at riches, the ostentation with which he squandered them, his picture-gallery, filled with masterpieces of Vandyke which had once been the property of ruined Cavaliers, his palace, which reared its long and stately front right opposite to the humbler residence of our kings, drew on him much deserved, and some undeserved, censure. . . . On the vices of the young and gay he looked with an aversion almost as bitter and contemptuous as that which he felt for the theological errors of the sectaries. He missed no opportunity of showing his scorn of the mimics, revellers, and courtesans who crowded the palace; and the admonitions which he addressed to the King himself were very sharp, and, what Charles disliked still more, very long. Scarcely any voice was raised in favor of a minister loaded with the double odium of faults which roused the fury of the people, and of virtues which annoyed and importuned the sovereign.

In considering these various methods of indirect characterization, we may, for convenience, class them under (a) action, — that is, things done; (b) personal peculiarities attendant upon action, such as speech, gesture, etc.; and (c) environment.

### a. Characterization by Action

No estimate of character is more common, and perhaps in the end more accurate, than that reached through the acts in which personality manifests itself. In literature this method of characterization is effective because it is natural, and, furthermore, because it offers to the reader an opportunity of exercising his own judgment, of becoming an interpreter. For this there is no opportunity by the direct, or expository, method; for here the conclusion has already been reached and is merely registered for reference. A writer of historical narrative

may say abstractly of Elizabeth that "she loved gaiety and laughter and wit; a happy retort or a finished compliment never failed to win her favour," and comprehension of the meaning is the only mental act demanded of the reader; clearness of expression is the principal rhetorical requisite. When, however, in *Kenilworth* we read of Sir Walter Raleigh's success with the Queen and of the painful failures of Tressilian and Blount to please their royal mistress, we not only understand what we read, but, in addition, we interpret, we read character into the various episodes, and we come to the same conclusion that the historian or the biographer would have stated in abstract terms.

It is also to be noted that the exposition of character through acts is not only natural and clear, but is often more dramatic than when presented directly. An appeal to the eye, to the ear, comes with greater effect than does the most carefully elaborated and coherent discourse addressed to the logical faculties. In *Adam Bede*, for instance, George Eliot often generalizes in the most abstract terms, as in the following expository passage: —

Possibly you think that Adam was not at all sagacious in his interpretations, and that it was altogether extremely unbecoming in a sensible man to behave as he did — falling in love with a girl who really had nothing more than her beauty to recommend her, attributing imaginary virtues to her, and even condescending to cleave to her after she had fallen in love with another man, waiting for her kind looks as a patient trembling dog waits for his master's eye to be turned upon him. But in so complex a thing as human nature, we must consider, it is hard to find rules without exceptions. Of course, I know that, as a rule, sensible men fall in love with the most sensible women of their acquaintance, see through all the pretty deceits of coquettish beauty, never imagine themselves loved when they are not loved, cease loving on all proper occasions, and marry



the woman most fitted for them in every respect — indeed, so as to compel the approbation of all the maiden ladies in their neighborhood. But even to this rule an exception will occur now and then in the lapse of centuries, and my friend Adam was one. For my own part, however, I respect him none the less: nay, I think the deep love he had for that sweet, rounded, blossom-like, dark-eyed Hetty, of whose inward self he was really very ignorant, came out of the very strength of his nature, and was not out of any inconsistent weakness. Is it any weakness, pray, to be wrought on by exquisite music? — to feel its wondrous harmonies searching the subtlest windings of your soul, the delicate fibres of life where no memory can penetrate, and binding together your whole being past and present in one unspeakable vibration: melting you in one moment with all the tenderness, all the love that has been scattered through the toilsome years, concentrating in one emotion of heroic courage or resignation all the hard-learned lessons of self-renouncing sympathy, blending your present joy with past sorrow, and your present sorrow with all your past joy? If not, then neither is it a weakness to be so wrought upon by the exquisite curves of a woman's cheek and neck and arms, by the liquid depths of her beseeching eyes, or the sweet childish pout of her lips. For the beauty of a lovely woman is like music: what can one say more? Beauty has an expression beyond and far above the one woman's soul that it clothes, as the words of genius have a wider meaning than the thought that prompted them: it is more than a woman's love that moves us in a woman's eyes — it seems to be a far-off mighty love that has come near to us, and made speech for itself there; the rounded neck, the dimpled arm, move us by something more than their prettiness — by their close kinship with all we have known of tenderness and peace. The noblest natures see the most of this *impersonal* expression in beauty (it is needless to say that there are gentlemen with whiskers dyed and undyed who see none of it whatever), and for this reason, the noblest nature is often the most blinded to the character of the one woman's soul that the beauty clothes. Whence, I fear, the tragedy of human life

is likely to continue for a long time to come, in spite of mental philosophers who are ready with the best receipts for avoiding all mistakes of the kind.

Our good Adam had no fine words into which he could put his feeling for Hetty; he could not disguise mystery in this way with the appearance of knowledge; he called his love frankly a mystery, as you have heard him. He only knew that the sight and memory of her moved him deeply, touching the spring of all love and tenderness, all faith and courage within him. How could he imagine narrowness, selfishness, hardness in her? He created the mind he believed in out of his own, which was large, unselfish, tender.

Here is certainly careful exposition of the character of Adam's love for Hetty, expressed with no little analytical detail. But the average reader would arrive at a fuller conception and appreciation of the strong man's passion for the weak girl by following Adam's acts and words from the time when his love first took form until it received its death-wound with Hetty's fall. Adam's visits to the Hall Farm, his hesitation, his walks through the fields, his discussions of love with Bartle Massey, his battle with Arthur, his utter prostration at the news of the child-murder, the faithful attendance at Stoniton jail — all these visible details go farther to reveal the true nature of Adam's love than do all the psychologic dissertations of the author. In contrast to the foregoing, the following concrete picture of Adam's abstraction and loss of initiative impulse presents with unquestionably greater effectiveness the alteration that took place in him after Hetty's imprisonment: —

An upper room in a dull Stoniton street, with two beds in it — one laid on the floor. It is ten o'clock on Thursday night, and the dark wall opposite the window shuts out the moonlight that might have struggled with the light of the one dip

candle by which Bartle Massey is pretending to read, while he is really looking over his spectacles at Adam Bede, seated near the dark window.

You would hardly have known it was Adam without being told. His face had got thinner this last week: he has the sunken eyes, the neglected beard of a man just risen from a sick-bed. His heavy black hair hangs over his forehead, and there is no active impulse in him which inclines him to push it off, that he may be more awake to what is around him. He has one arm over the back of the chair, and he seems to be looking down at his clasped hands.

A striking illustration of the vividness secured by concrete presentation of character is to be found in the opening chapter of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, where Bathsheba Everdene — not unlike Hetty in her love of self — indulges in action that reveals her frank admiration of herself as a “fair product of Nature in the feminine kind.” Certainly a more vivid conception of the heroine’s personality is secured from witnessing with Gabriel Oak this pantomime by the roadside than could be derived from a series of the abstractions in which the author frequently indulges.

An element of narrative coherence would seem to result from this method of presenting character through acts; for while personality is in the process of being expounded, the chronicling of the events that constitute the main thread need not be interrupted. The two processes become one. There is none of the interruption, and of the consequent incoherence, that is likely to result when direct characterization is interpolated and the succession of events, for the time being, is brought to a full stop.

#### **b. Characterization by Speech, etc.**

The second method of indirect characterization has to do with personal mannerisms, including individualities

of gesture, speech, and the like attendant upon acts. The mere presentation of personal oddities in manner and speech is, in one sense, but journeyman's work; the hand of the master becomes evident as the delineation of these externals is attended by equal clearness of internal portraiture. The criticism is often made that Dickens's creations are but lay figures, such as we see in the shop-windows—striking, indeed, highly colored, and, at a glance, rather accurate representations, but, on close examination, lacking in reality; that Mr. Carker is all teeth, Mr. Turveydrop all deportment. And perhaps nothing better illustrates characters that, together with all their oddities, may yet be human than to place over against Carker and Turveydrop Mr. Pickwick, Sarah Gamp, or Betsey Trotwood,—not necessarily that these represent Dickens's highest attainment in characterization, but that they are in marked contrast to caricatures unvitalized by convincing personality. Mr. Pickwick, to be sure, is usually labeled with spectacles and black gaiters; Mrs. Gamp with umbrella, fragrant breath, and allusions to Mrs. Harris of ghostly memory; Betsey Trotwood with antipathy to donkeys: but with all their conventionalities these creations are so essentially human that they seem far more real than the Carkers, Turveydrops, and all their company.

Amateurs in narrative writing should observe that, if personal characterization—the portrayal of individuality—be their purpose, the peculiarities with which they endow their creations must, in some way, contribute to that portrayal. Nothing is more simple than to indicate a squint, a glib tongue, a halting gait, ebullition of spirits, but it does not follow that we shall have as a result a Sampson Brass, an Alfred Jingle, a Quilp, or a Wilkins Micawber. Anything remotely approaching

real personality may still be lacking. Mrs. Nickleby and her prototype, Miss Bates, in Jane Austen's *Emma*, are, from one point of view, but mere impersonations of incoherence gone mad, yet their consistent fatuousness is almost convincing, and many a reader feels that he knows Mrs. Nickleby as well as he does Florence Dombey, that Miss Bates is no more unreal than is Emma Woodhouse or Harriet Smith. It must be admitted that the two cases cited from Dickens and Jane Austen are extreme, partaking of the nature of caricature, but there is nevertheless a structural principle involved: in rendering personage presentation objective and distinct, peculiarities of speech and dress do serve a distinct purpose; but in character portrayal external peculiarities must constantly be relegated to the category of the accidents rather than the essentials of individuality. It may serve to objectify our conception of Tommy Traddles to know that his hair was in a chronic state of ungovernable stiffness, or of Lady Kew to know that the sharpness of her tongue was dreaded by all the Newcome family; but the stiff hair and the sharp tongue are not the essentials that arouse a sense of fellowship with Traddles or of wholesome dread for the aged Countess.

The effect that personal peculiarities may have, not only in focusing our mental picture, but in bringing out and intensifying the essential self of a character, is well illustrated in the case of Major Pendennis. Pen's uncle is as clearly portrayed as is Mr. Micawber or Mr. Pecksniff, but he is, in addition, more human. Even the enthusiastic lover of *David Copperfield* or of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is compelled to admit that Micawber and Pecksniff, with all their convincingness, belong rather to the world of Dickens than to the everyday life of Canterbury or of

Salisbury. But with Thackeray's hero it is different: characteristic oddities the Major has in abundance, — his thorough-going regard for a coronet, his niceties of personal appearance and deportment, his self-respect, his blunt honesty, — yet with them all he is no wooden figure; he is as essentially human as the men of our own personal acquaintance. Tags of identification have been made to blend masterfully in with a realistic personality.

But at this point one must remember that characterization is not the principal end of narrative writing, and that it must therefore be subordinated. A story is not written for the mere sake of expounding character any more than a sermon is written for the mere purpose of exhibiting the clergyman's rich voice or his power of drawing tears, valuable as may be these persuasive gifts. Many so-called stories in recent periodical literature — especially of the undergraduate variety — are not unlike the homilies that the Reverend Charles Honeyman used to deliver in Lady Whittlesea's chapel: they are composed with an eye to the exploitation of the writer's proficiency rather than for edification. The character sketch of course has its place, but the character sketch belongs to the realm of description or of exposition, as the case may be. Its purpose is to present a picture or to make clear a conception, — not to set in order the details that constitute a transaction. In strict narrative, then, the *patois* of the French Canadian or the dialect of the plantation hand serves a legitimate purpose when the guide or the negro is a character demanded by the exigencies of the occurrence in hand. For example, in *Two Gentlemen of Kentucky*, James Lane Allen has a story to tell, a distinct train of occurrences, and the actors in his narrative are Colonel Romulus Fields and his old negro servant Peter. In order to present the pathos of decayed gentility and of

loyal fidelity there is no reason why the author should not have reverted to the days of the Roman Republic or to the civilization of Rameses, had he so desired; wherever he might find an environment and characters that would effectively set forth the motive of the narrative, there he was free to set his action. But for the particular series of events that he wished to chronicle in his narrative, the old Southern gentleman and his former slave were fitted perfectly, as was also the Kentucky setting. All combine to form what has already been defined as "atmosphere" (p. 85).

*A New England Nun* presents excellent illustration of the intimate relation that exists between the act and the character adjusted to the act. The note that the author wishes to strike is contained in the closing paragraph: Louisa Ellis's deliberate renunciation of her birthright — a faithful husband and assured life-companionship — in exchange for the isolation of the cloistered nun, where, in the society of the fluffy canary bird and the rampageous Cæsar, she might pass her days sewing linen seams and distilling roses. As the personality best suited to the exposition of this humble preference for neatness and fidelity to the little details of prim housekeeping, the author selects a New England village and a conventional old maid. Between the simple action of the story and the principal agent there is a fitness of adjustment that results in remarkable unity of effect. If, now, this story were to be recast so that instead of plain Louisa Ellis we should have a Genoese noblewoman of historic lineage, residing in her ancestral palace on the Strada Nuova, the loss of effect would at once become evident. It is not that the conception of Genoese nobility is essentially inconsistent with that of maiden ladies and of renunciation of all marital responsibilities, yet the reader is at once con-

scious of an incongruity in the one characterization that does not offend him in the other. The narrative carries conviction and satisfaction when the reader feels that the peculiarities of characterization blend with the narrative and invigorate it, and when he is not forced into believing that the narrative exists for the mere sake of setting forth oddities of characterization.

With the amateur the method is often quite different. He conceives a plot, it may be, and then proceeds to work out his characters and his setting with more regard to their elaboration than to their due subordination. The pages of undergraduate magazines teem with profane sea-captains and cow-punchers, incomprehensible Maine guides and Mexican half-breeds, impossible Yankee farmers and fishermen. It is often entirely possible that the scene laid in Gloucester might be transferred to the wastes of the alkali deserts by simply readjusting the dialect and by substituting "Arizona Bill" for "Old Cap'n Jabez Cook of Nantucket." If, however, one tries such reorganization with the stories of Thomas Nelson Page or of Margaret Deland, he will soon understand the significance of the principle that peculiarities of personal characterization, like setting, are at their best when they form an essential part of the narrative in its entirety and intensify the dramatic effect.

The following crude attempt at narrative composition may be considered an extreme illustration of what has preceded: —

#### MARIE

For several long years he had loved this girl with a burning passion. For almost seven years she had been indifferent and cold. How responsive she had seemed during those first few days of their acquaintance! But how soon her warmth had turned to ice. How he had striven, day after day, to revive



that ardor which she had seemed to possess at first, but — in vain. To-day she might seem on the point of softening toward him. How his hopes would rise. To-morrow she would freeze his very bones by her haughty aloofness. Thus it had been for seven long years.

And what was the cause of her actions? He could stand it no longer. He would go to her this very night and know. One more appeal he would make. If she were sympathetic, — but he could not hope for that.

It was now late in the afternoon. It had been one of those chill November days when every breath of air seems to work its way into the very marrow of one's bones.

How his heart yearned. If she accepted him, — but how could he expect this after she had dismissed him so cruelly the night before? As he hastily dressed, every nerve in his body trembled under the excitement of the moment; this same thought came flashing into his mind: "If she accepts me!" and every time he would expel it with the words, "But she will not!"

And what would he do if she did not? He would fly to the other hemisphere. He would leave his loved France forever, the home of his childhood. He would hide himself in some obscure corner of the earth.

He found himself on the great stone steps leading up to the house where his loved one was. Like a madman he sprang up those steps and dashed into the old French mansion. Not once stopping to notice that the hall was dark, he rushed on through the house shouting, "I want Marie!"

The door of the sitting room flew open.

There in the doorway stood the family — all that was left of the old line — mother, son about ten years of age, and Marie.

The man stopped short before the terrified inmates of the dwelling, and repeated again his former cry, "I want Marie!"

For a moment no one stirred. Then, like the slender stock of wheat which sways so gracefully in the tempest or the gentle breeze, so Marie, with face white as snow, after gently motioning to her two companions to draw back, advanced a step.

"What do you wish, Jean?" was the calm query, as she softly closed the door behind her.

"I want Marie," was all that the poor man could utter.

"But you can't have Marie," was the gentle reply.

"I want Marie. I must have Marie," wailed the frantic man.

"But you can not have Marie," was the now emphatic reply.

The man stood glaring for a moment before him, and then, turning without a word, he fled from the house into total darkness.

It was three years later. In front of a little brush fire sat an old man. His hair was white; his cheeks were sunken. The marks of suffering were upon his face, a face which one could readily see had not always been thus, — a face of sorrow.

To-night, as he sat before the sputtering fire, comfortably leaning back against a tree, smoking his old clay pipe, this man was thinking of his experiences during the past three years. He was thinking how he had fled from that house on that terrible night, when she had spurned him. How, without even going to his apartment he had boarded a steamer and was, before midnight, on the high seas going — he knew not whither. How, fifteen days later, he had landed in New York. How he had roamed about for a time; but the multitude of people had driven him away. He could not stand the throng; he must have seclusion. And since that day when he first reached the woods, he had been a wanderer, going from house to house, yet ever keeping as much as possible in the forest.

The weather was warm. The first fall frosts were a month away. There was really no need of a fire save for company, and what a friend a little brushwood fire is.

The old man arose from his restful position and stood before the dying embers for a few moments. From his pocket he drew a dingy card and gazed at it longingly for several minutes; then, replacing it, he turned slowly and entered the rude log hut.

After spreading himself out on the hard floor he was soon asleep.

If perchance he had happened to peep through a crack in the logs he might have seen the form of a woman not forty rods from him, stealing silently toward the hut. And if he had moved his hand a trifle to the right, as it lay there on the cold, damp earth, it would have touched something, a little round ball, very soft and warm. But he was fast asleep.

The next morning dawned gray and cold. It was too cold to snow.

As Jean opened his eyes he made an attempt to rise. What a terrible pain shot through his whole body! He could not move a muscle without agonizing torture.

As he lay there, motionless, thoughts began to come into his mind. Remembrances of that terrible disappointment more than three years ago. He saw before him the vision of that beautiful girl in France.

The man was crazy. He had been crazy ever since his great love had first entered his soul. He had been crazed on that night in France. No sane man would have acted as he did. But, at times, he could think rationally. He was beginning to think rationally now. It lasted but a moment, however; the next moment he was wandering again but —

Something crashed in the side of the rude hut. It landed upon his breast. It was the mother of the little warm ball of fur which had been so close to him the evening before.

The man uttered a groan and then with a fierceness almost equal to the fierceness of the animal above him, he cried, "I want Marie!"

Two days later the good woman who had been looking for the old hermit the night before found all that was left of him, — a few bones and some tattered garments.

Without going too deeply into this harrowing tale, we may perhaps consider one or two matters that suggest themselves in connection with the question of characterization. Why should the hero of the tragedy be por-

trayed as a Frenchman? — unless, perhaps, because the writer felt that the “brainstorm” under which his principal actor seemed to be suffering at the beginning was peculiarly Gallic in character. Again there would seem to be no particular reason for portraying the heroine as “the last of the old line”; there is nothing in her action that renders such portrayal fitting. With equal reason the writer might have described Marie as a Spanish *señorita* in Barcelona, an Amsterdam Gretchen with wooden shoes, or a Whitechapel greengrocer’s daughter. Other similar details of characterization — as well as of setting — will undoubtedly suggest themselves.

Another fault that is common in amateurish attempts at characterization by means of action is the failure to present sufficient details. The picture itself is indistinct, and it is consequently difficult, if not impossible, to draw any inferences from the picture. If the exigencies of the action are best served by making the heroine a staid New England spinster, the portrait must be unmistakable. If the little touches are so typical and at the same time so individual that we can see Louisa Ellis as she “quilts her needle carefully in her work, which she folds precisely, and lays in a basket with her thimble and thread and scissors,” then the action serves its purpose. But if she is merely labeled “a typical old maid,” and we can neither see nor know her, there is no dramatic gain save as the reader’s imagination may supply what the writer’s picture should have portrayed. In the story that has already been cited (pp. 128–31), admitting for the sake of the argument that there is some artistic reason for making Marie’s family “the last of the old line,” we must see them clearly and distinctly in this character, else why label them in this definite fashion? Adequate descriptive data are necessary in such cases, not only for

the characterization that comes through action but for mere distinctness of personage portrayal.

In considering speech as a means to indirect characterization, we should note the twofold significance of the term "speech," which may refer either to the mode of utterance or to the spoken matter itself. In each of these we have a natural and universally recognized manifestation of personality. Words, like acts, indicate human nature. Narrative literature abounds in instances of this principle. The action of *Hamlet* without the famous soliloquies is indeed "*Hamlet* with the Prince left out." It is not only Colonel Newcome's angry departure from the Cave of Harmony on the evening when we first make the acquaintance of Clive and the returned Indian officer that gives us our first insight into his personality; it is also the burning indignation that breaks forth in his denunciation of the hoary old sinner who dares sing a ribald ditty in the presence of a young boy.

In presenting what is actually said, a fundamental requirement is absolute harmony between the matter put into the mouth of the character and the general exposition of that character as a personage. If there is to be any real illusion, any real conviction as to reality and naturalness, the reader must be made to lose himself in the scene. He must accept a speaker's words as the natural expression to be expected under the circumstances. Stiffness, conventionality, "talking like a book," giving voice to thoughts inconsistent with the character as delineated, failure to preserve every turn of dialect or manner of utterance, — all these are fatal to effective delineation; they leave the reader's imagination unconvinced. This is apparent in many of the stories that were popular a few generations ago. It is not so much that idioms have changed as that the writers of narra-

tive to-day pay far greater attention to the details of realism. No one nowadays would be swept away by the effectiveness of such dialogue as the following from *Sandford and Merton*, at one time a very popular work of fiction, — dialogue supposed to take place between two little boys about six years of age. One of them, Tommy Merton, has been chafing his half-frozen limbs before a fire that the other, Harry Sandford, has lighted, and he says that he never would have believed that a few dried sticks could have been of so much consequence to him. The conversation then proceeds in this delightful manner: —

“Ah!” answered Harry, “Master Tommy, you have been brought up in such a manner that you never knew what it was to want anything. But that is not the case with thousands and millions of people. I have seen hundreds of poor children that have neither bread to eat, fire to warm, nor clothes to cover them. Only think, then, what a disagreeable situation they must be in: yet they are so accustomed to hardship that they do not cry in a twelvemonth as much as you have done within this quarter of an hour.”

“Why,” answered Tommy, a little disconcerted at the observation of his crying, “it cannot be expected that gentlemen should be able to bear all these inconveniences as well as the poor.”

“Why not?” answered Harry: “Is not a gentleman as much a man as the poor can be? And, if he is a man, should he not accustom himself to support every thing that his fellow-creatures do?”

*Tommy*: “That is very true. But he will have all the conveniences of life provided for him, victuals to eat, a good warm bed, and fire to warm him.”

*Harry*: “But he is not sure of having all these things as long as he lives. Besides, I have often observed the gentlemen and ladies in our neighborhood, riding about in coaches, and

covered from head to foot, yet shaking with the least breath of air as if they all had agues; while the children of the poor run about bare-footed upon the ice, and divert themselves with making snow-balls."

And thus these infant sociologists ingenuously argue with each other until the reader becomes well-nigh desperate with the utter unnaturalness of the dialogue.

Of course even the "untutored savage" may have his rude ideas of truths that have perplexed the sages, but he will not discourse of subliminal consciousness nor pronounce upon the ethical values of pragmatism. Defoe realized this principle when he made Friday utter his crude thoughts on the existence of God:—

During the long time that Friday had now been with me, and that he began to speak to me, and understand me, I was not wanting to lay a foundation of religious knowledge in his mind; particularly I asked him one time who made him. The poor creature did not understand me at all, but thought I had asked him who was his father: but I took it by another handle, and asked him who made the sea, the ground we walked on, and the hills and woods. He told me, "It was one Benamuckee, that lived beyond all"; he could describe nothing of this great person, but that he was very old, "much older," he said, "than the sea or the land, than the moon or the stars." I asked him then, if this old person had made all things, why did not all things worship him? He looked very grave, and, with a perfect look of innocence, said, "All things said O! to him." I asked him if the people who die in his country went anywhere. He said, "Yes; they all went to Benamuckee." Then I asked him whether those they eat up went thither too. He said, "Yes."

The reader is satisfied with the entire naturalness of Friday's simple theology, summed up in the one article that God is one to whom all creatures say "O!" But Dickens did not feel this necessity for realistic speech

when he put into the mouth of little Paul Dombey the wholly unchildlike bit of religio-æsthetic criticism that the "print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough." Friday is quite natural; Paul is impossible.

The reader must not be permitted to become conscious of the critical attitude and to question the naturalness of the writer's expression; otherwise he will fail to be convinced and all reality of characterization will be lost. This demands of a writer effacement of self in his own work. He must see so truly and so intensely as to become for the time being the very character that he would create. His own peculiarities of expression, his own views and experiences may be wholly out of place and untrue to life when attributed to another. In this connection we may cite two contrasting scenes dealing with a common theme: the death of Colonel Newcome in Thackeray's *The Newcomes* and that of Paul Dombey already referred to. The ordinary reader forgets himself and Thackeray in the one; he is present at the bedside; he sees the Colonel rise at the sound of the old bell in the tower above his chamber; he hears the final "adsum"; and he feels the desolation that follows the passing of a loved friend. In the other, however, he does not forget that he is a reader; he is conscious of Dickens in every line; and he loses all sense of illusion.

The manner of speech sometimes merges so naturally into the matter itself that one does not think of separating them as distinct elements in characterization. To draw another illustration from Dickens, our conception of Sam Weller is inextricably connected with his cockney turns of expression and his ingenious similes, on the one hand, and with his shrewdness and humor, on the other. Manner and matter are essentially one.

The old saw to the effect that "actions speak louder



than words" would seem to imply that we are not masters of what we do in the same degree as of what we say; that there is greater opportunity for fallacious inference in judging character from one's words and manner of utterance than from one's deeds. This in turn would account for the fact that, in those forms of narrative writing in which we have dramatic characterization rather than the mere chronicling of events, we often find great stress laid upon speech and attendant action. The importance of these two elements is recognized even in the prosaic law court and determines to considerable extent the convincingness of certain classes of evidence. When a witness frankly bears testimony to facts that make against his own interests, his very frankness tends to establish his honesty. Undesigned testimony, given with evident want of suspicion on the part of a witness as to what bearing his words may have on the case, often goes far to convince the court of the witness's sincerity, ingenuousness, or simplicity. Crafty counsel set careful traps to surprise a witness into betraying guilt by word or action and thus to influence judge or jury. In the following scene from Anna Katharine Green's *The Filigree Ball* we have an illustration of this device made to shadow personality by the action attending speech:—

Certainly this woman was a thoroughbred or else she was an adept in deception such as few of us had ever encountered. The quietness of her manner, the easy tone, the quiet eyes, eyes in whose dark depths quiet passions were visible, but passions that were under the control of an equally forcible will, made her a puzzle to all men's minds; but it was a fascinating puzzle that awoke a species of awe in those who attempted to understand her. To all appearance she was the unlikeliest woman possible to cherish criminal intents, yet her answers were rather clever than convincing, unless you allowed yourself to be

swayed by the look of her beautiful face or the music of her rich, sad voice.

"You did not remain before those book-shelves long?" observed the coroner.

"You have a witness who knows more about that than I do," she suggested; and doubtless aware of the temerity of this reply, waited with unmoved countenance, but with a visibly bounding breast, for what would doubtless prove a fresh attack.

It was a violent one, and of a character she was least fitted to meet. Taking up the box I have so often mentioned, the coroner drew away the ribbon lying on the top and disclosed the pistol. In a moment her hands went over her ears.

"Why do you do that?" he asked. "Did you think I was going to discharge it?"

She smiled pitifully as she let her hands fall again.

"I have a dread of firearms," she explained. "I always have had. Now they are simply terrible to me, and this one — "

"I understand," said the coroner, with a slight glance in the direction of Durbin. They had evidently planned this test together on the strength of an idea suggested to Durbin by her former action when the memory of this shot was recalled to her.

"Your horror seems to lie in the direction of the noise they make," continued her inexorable interlocutor. "One would say you had heard this pistol discharged."

Instantly a complete breaking-up of her hitherto well maintained composure altered her whole aspect and she vehemently cried: —

"I did, I did. I was on Waverley Avenue that night, and I heard the shot which in all probability ended my sister's life. I walked farther than I intended: I strolled into the street which had such bitter memories for us and I heard — No, I was not in search of my sister. I had not associated my sister's going out with any intention of visiting this house; I was merely troubled in mind and anxious and — and — "

She had overrated her strength or her cleverness. She found

herself unable to finish the sentence, and so did not try. She had been led by the impulse of the moment farther than she had intended, and, aghast at her own imprudence, paused with her first perceptible loss of courage before the yawning gulf before her.

I felt myself seized by a very uncomfortable dread lest her concealments and unfinished sentences hid a guiltier knowledge of this crime than I was yet ready to admit.<sup>1</sup>

The "quietness of manner," the evidence in the eyes of "quiet passions under the control of a forcible will," the "apparent lack of all criminal intent," bring out with all the more effect the subsequent "complete break-up of her well-maintained composure," and produce in the reader something of the same emotion that impressed the coroner and the spectators, — a strong conviction as to the insincerity, if not the guilt, of the witness. In consequence, all the greater dramatic force attends the evolution of the plot. Masters of narration are always alive to the value of this device, and give to their characters all the details of facial expression, of gesture, of tone that attend actual utterance, in this way securing to the dialogue something of real vitality.

In the dialect story and in all characterization that seeks to present speech realistically and naturally, we must note that, if the writer seeks no more than the portrayal of a picturesque figure, — a Canadian half-breed, a plantation hand, — his work is descriptive in function; the dialect or the oddity of speech serves the same end as do details of dress or of feature. The finished effort is an objective character sketch; it is personage portrayal. On the other hand, the individualities of speech may serve more than the mere purpose of objecti-

<sup>1</sup> From *The Filigree Ball*. Copyright, 1902. Used by permission of the publishers, The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

fying a personage; they may be elaborated to present a clearer and deeper insight into personality, and in this way to intensify the dramatic power of the events chronicled. The descriptive element in this case becomes essential to the narration. Such is the case in a novel like *Tess*, where the heroine's Wessex speech is quite necessary to our conception of the girl. The same thing is true in the case of history where individualities of expression are presented in order that, seeing the statesman or the soldier more accurately, we may understand his policy or his strategy more fully. Macaulay offers an instance of this when, in sketching Newcastle as a central figure in the politics of Walpole's time, he presents him thus:

In truth he was a satire ready made. All that the art of the satirist does for other men, nature had done for him. Whatever was absurd about him stood out with grotesque prominence from the rest of the character. He was a living, moving, talking caricature. His gait was a shuffling trot; his utterance a rapid stutter; he was always in a hurry; he was never in time; he abounded in fulsome caresses and in hysterical tears. His oratory resembled that of Justice Shallow. It was nonsense effervescent with animal spirits and impertinence. Of his ignorance many anecdotes remain, some well authenticated, some probably invented at coffee-houses, but all exquisitely characteristic. "Oh — yes — yes — to be sure — Annapolis must be defended — troops must be sent to Annapolis — Pray where is Annapolis?" — "Cape Breton an island! wonderful! — show me it in the map. So it is, sure enough. My dear sir, you always bring us good news. I must go and tell the King that Cape Breton is an island."

Macaulay's attempt to photograph Newcastle's stuttering incoherence and shallowness of mind serves a double purpose: objectively Newcastle is brought more distinctly before the reader's imagination, and subject-

ively he is characterized, individualized, by what he says.

With the development of narrative literature, and of fiction in particular, there has come increased realism in the art of reproducing dialectic and personal oddities of speech. All the vowels and consonants, aided by battalions of diacritical marks and by fantastically distorted spelling, have been enlisted into the service. A comparison of almost any story written a century or more ago and a modern dialect narrative will illustrate this. The following are fair examples.

In Captain Marryat's *Peter Simple* (1834) one of the most famous passages is the picture of the so-called "dignity ball," given by colored people in the Barbadoes. Their ridiculous aping of European manners, their absurd airs and outlandish dress, are portrayed at length. Then follows an account of the ball itself. From this we make a selection illustrating how the writer presents negro-English: —

At this moment stepped forth the premier violin, master of the ceremonies and ballet master, Massa Johnson, really a very smart man, who gave lessons in dancing to all the "Badian ladies." . . . His *bow-tick*, or fiddlestick, was his wand, whose magic rap on the fiddle produced immediate obedience to his mandates. "Ladies and gentle, take your places." All started up. "Miss Eurydice, you open de ball." Miss Eurydice had but a sorry partner, but she undertook to instruct me. O'Brien was our *vis-à-vis* with Miss Euterpe. The other gentlemen were officers from the ships, and we stood up twelve, chequered brown and white like a chess-board. All eyes were fixed upon Mr. Apollo Johnson, who first looked at the couples, then at his fiddle, and, lastly, at the other musicians, to see if all was right, and then with a wave of his *bow-tick* the music began. "Massa Lieutenant," cried Apollo to O'Brien, "cross over to opposite lady, right hand and left, den figure to Miss Eurydice

— dat right; now four hand round. You lilly midshipman, set your partner, sir; den twist her round; dat do, now stop. First figure all over.” At this time I thought I might venture to talk a little with my partner, and I ventured a remark; to my surprise she answered very sharply, “I come here for dance, sar, and not for chatter; look Massa Johnson, he tap um bow-tick,” etc.

To one who is familiar with modern fiction the foregoing would seem but a crude attempt to reproduce the speech of the negro. Far more ambitious and detailed is, for instance, the method of Joel Chandler Harris. For example:

“Ole Brer Bull wuz grazin’ in de pastur’ des like nothin’ ain’t happen, but he keep on de watch. When he’d see Simmy-Sam anywhars out’n de yard, Brer Bull ’ud sorter feed to’rds ’im, but Simmy-Sam wan’t takin’ no chances, en he kep’ close ter kivver. But creeturs is mo’ patient-like dan what foks is, en bimeby it got so Simmy-Sam ’ud go funder en funder fum de house, en one day de ’oman sont ’im out in de woods atter some pine kindlin’, en he got ter playin’ en foolin’ ’roun’. You know how chillun is, en how dey will do: well, dat des de way Simmy-Sam done. He des frolicked ’roun’ out dar in de brush, twel bimeby he hear ole Brer Bull come a-rippin’ en a-snortin’ thoo de woods! Hit in about looked like his time wuz up.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Harris takes the reproduction of the negro dialect very seriously. He queries whether in the homely words of Uncle Remus we may not trace philological changes from the English of three hundred years ago that would be of interest to the student of linguistics. He suggests that dozens of words such as “hit” for “it” and “ax” for “ask” might open to such a student the whole field of

<sup>1</sup> *Uncle Remus and His Friends*. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

English philology. All of which indicates the modern tendency to submit everything to the test of reality and science. Yet amid all this effort on the part of modern writers to photograph speech, as it were, the student of narrative literature will do well occasionally to recall that there is something more important and more essential than verisimilitude.<sup>1</sup> Upon this very subject, the over-use of dialect, a writer in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1897 said: —

In the main, the practice of the best writers confirms the rule that dialect should only be used to convey ideas for the expression of which the standard language is inadequate, and should be used only to an extent sufficient to mark the individuality of the speaker. Where the use of dialect is really vitalizing, where it emphasizes a character really worth knowing, it is permissible, but not otherwise. And after all, the experience for which the literary language does not provide sufficient expression is comparatively unimportant. It is a sign of degeneracy in our literature when writers deliberately resort to the grotesque, the archaic, or the vernacular. It is the duty of his countrymen to maintain the credit of the tongue that Shakespeare wrote. We owe far more to it than to any dialect.

### c. Characterization by Environment

Character, finally, may be presented by means of environment, which in this connection is to be considered from two opposite points of view — actively, as determining character, and passively, as determined by it. In the first of these two aspects, — the active, — environment is but a phase of setting, and as such has already been discussed (pp. 79–82). In so far, however, as character works upon environment, modifies it, and by so doing displays its own vigor, it rises superior to attendant circumstance, and the consideration of this phase

of narrative writing belongs not to setting but to the various devices for presenting effectively the personality that possesses the power of modification.

Man's surroundings are in no small degree determined, created by him; circumstances give direction to character, but at the same time they are dominated by character, receive its stamp, and offer concrete evidence of its existence. Just as the prostrate tree gives evidence of the sweep of the hurricane, so some concrete act may give indication of the character that dictates it. The narrative method under discussion would give some impression of the storm by presenting a vivid picture of the havoc; would present a clear conception of the personality by showing definitely not the environment that may have made that personality possible, but the environment that the personality itself has created. For instance, in the exposition of Elizabeth's character, to which reference has been made on page 117, the traits that the Queen drew from Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn are indicated as determining elements in Elizabeth's personality. Knowing them, we can better understand the royal character. On the other hand, her favorites, the enemies that she made, the court that she gathered about her, the ministers that she selected to maintain her policies, — these also shadow forth the personality of Elizabeth. Or again, in *Tess*, Angel Clare's environment, as well as the traits that he inherited from his parents, is a strong element in determining the man's personality; but the course of life that he deliberately elected to pursue, the woman whom he chose as his wife, — these, which may be called the results of his personality, set forth Angel Clare's character with no less distinctness. Excellent illustration of the same device is presented in *A New England Nun*: —



She had been peacefully sewing at her sitting-room window all the afternoon. Now she quilted her needle carefully into her work, which she folded precisely, and laid in a basket with her thimble and thread and scissors. Louisa Ellis could not remember that ever in her life she had mislaid one of these little feminine appurtenances, which had become, from long use and constant association, a very part of her personality.

Louisa tied a green apron round her waist, and got out a flat straw hat with a green ribbon. Then she went into the garden with a little blue crockery bowl, to pick some currants for her tea. After the currants were picked she sat on the back doorstep and stemmed them, collecting the stems carefully in her apron, and afterwards throwing them into the hen-coop. She looked sharply at the grass beside the step to see if any had fallen there.<sup>1</sup>

Now this environment of trivial detail "had become by long use and constant association a very part of her personality," and had made her inevitably what she was; yet we have here an environment that Louisa Ellis had made and was still making for herself; and, being the product of her personality, the result of her own deliberate volition, it is interesting as indicative of her true self.

Allied to this narrative device of expounding character by showing the various influences of that character upon personal environment, is the process of expounding character through contrast, wherein we have the complete rejection of the moulding influence and thereby a revelation of the personality concerned. The pages of true as well as of fictitious narrative abound with instances illustrating the value of a contrasting environment in showing forth character. Queen Elizabeth again

<sup>1</sup> Miss Wilkins's *A New England Nun*. Copyright, 1891. Used by permission of the publishers, Harper and Brothers.

becomes a more definite entity when we view her in contrast to Mary Queen of Scots, with whom she was brought into sharp conflict. As portrayed by Walter Scott in *Kenilworth*, Leicester is made clearer and more definite by the scenes in which Sussex plays a part, and Tressilian, too, in many ways affords an effective foil in the characterization of the great Earl. George Eliot makes extensive use of this principle of contrast throughout *Romola*. "The Florentine Lily," in the purity of her life, in her filial devotion, in her loyalty to high ideals, presents a consistent contrast to Tito, who is untrue to his wife, who sacrifices his foster-parent to his own selfish interests, and to whom personal gratification is ever the foremost consideration. Altruism as opposed to self-love is presented with greater vividness than could be secured by the individual presentation of either *Romola* or Tito. The dramatic effect is greatly increased by the contrast in personalities.

## RHETORICAL QUALITIES IN CHARACTERIZATION

### Clearness

Characterization, whether of personage or personality, demands a rhetorical quality that hitherto has received little attention: clearness. Like correct spelling and punctuation, grammatical construction, and reputable use of words, clearness of expression has been taken for granted, but at this point it must receive some detailed consideration.

The objective delineation of a personage must first of all be entirely distinct; and in the subjective exposition of character the abstract qualities must be made so clear that the personality in question shall be unmistakable. The discussion of clearness in this connection at

once suggests the question of the type and the individual. The typical character will be distinguished by traits that belong to the class; that is, by general traits: the individual character will be differentiated from others of its class by those peculiarities that make it essentially itself. It is a common fault with young writers to describe their heroes and heroines by class characteristics only, with the result that these creations possess as little real distinction as do the conventional broad-shouldered, lantern-jawed, and small-headed gentry that figure in the advertisements for ready-made clothing and "gents'" underwear. One inexperienced author thus begins a story:—

George Kasson, junior member of the firm of J. T. Kasson, Son, and Co., bond brokers, of Chicago, college graduate, athlete, president of his class, and already, in his twenty-fifth year, rising to prominence among the younger business fraternity of the seething western metropolis, a leader by will, if not by birth, was busily dressing in his room at the Grand Hotel at Sacramento.

And a little later on we are introduced to the heroine thus:—

A piquant visage with big, round blue eyes, unobtrusive nose and gently fluctuating nostrils, lips enchantingly pink and forming a perfect Cupid's bow, cheeks suffused with a healthy, warm flush, and all set off by a luxurious mound of silken, fluffy hair.

It is needless to say that each of these pictures, as far as effectiveness is concerned, is a dismal failure. No two readers will see the same figures. In each case the writer has selected only the type characteristics of the young man and the young woman of the period: in the one case, college education, athletic prowess, popularity, ambi-

tion; in the other, blue eyes, small nose, pink lips, fluffy hair. There is no trace of individuality.

For distinctness of impression contrast with either of the preceding the following picture of Judge Pyncheon as he ascends Hepzibah's steps in *The House of the Seven Gables*: —

As the child went down the steps, a gentleman ascended them, and made his entrance into the shop. It was the portly, and, had it possessed the advantage of a little more height, would have been the stately figure of a man considerably in the decline of life, dressed in a black suit of some thin stuff, resembling broadcloth as closely as possible. A gold-headed cane of rare Oriental wood, added materially to the high respectability of his aspect, as did also a neckcloth of the utmost snowy purity, and the conscientious polish of his boots. His dark, square countenance, with its almost shaggy depth of eyebrows, was naturally impressive, and would, perhaps, have been rather stern, had not the gentleman considerably taken upon himself to mitigate the harsh effect by a look of exceeding good-humor and benevolence. Owing, however, to a somewhat massive accumulation of animal substance about the lower region of his face, the look was, perhaps, unctuous, rather than spiritual, and had, so to speak, a kind of fleshly effulgence, not altogether so satisfactory as he doubtless intended it to be. A susceptible observer, at any rate, might have regarded it as affording very little evidence of the general benignity of soul whereof it purported to be the outward reflection. And if the observer chanced to be ill-natured, as well as acute and susceptible, he would probably suspect that the smile on the gentleman's face was a good deal akin to the shine on his boots, and that each must have cost him and his boot-black, respectively, a good deal of hard labor to bring out and preserve them.

In this picture, Hawthorne has presented not so much the characteristics that might be selected as typical of every conventional country squire as those that

distinguished Judge Pyncheon from all other country squires. The judge has, indeed, what we may call the hall-marks of his class: the gold-headed cane, the white neck-cloth, the black broadcloth suit, the square countenance and shaggy eyebrows,—all combining in one general effect of stateliness and respectability. But with all this there is something that makes Judge Pyncheon essentially an individual; something that leaves upon the reader's mind a perfectly definite impression.

The same general rule holds as to clearness in presenting personality. A writer seeing in his subject only conventional and class characteristics fails to discover to the reader those little touches that differentiate man from man. The objective picture perhaps may be clear enough. The reader may *see* the hero, the heroine, the country squire, the village doctor, with absolute distinctness and may yet fail to *know* him. So it is when one looks over a number of strange faces in some public gathering. The various individuals are distinct enough objectively as one looks at them, and yet each remains a stranger; no single personality is revealed. So in the characterization that attends narration: there must, for subjective directness, be something deeper than mere firmness of external outline. Further, too, we must have more than a mere type of personality. It is not enough to know that a man is hypocritical or sincere, close-fisted or generous. Not all hypocrites are Pecksniffs, nor are all misers Isaacs of York.

The portrayal of the type and of the individual suggests the subject of caricature, to which reference has already been made. Caricature, or hyperbole in characterization, may easily result from the attempt to avoid vagueness in portrayal. To objectify a personage beyond all possibility of error, the writer goes to the extreme of

elaborating some one characteristic unduly and disproportionately. The result is a picture that is so unnatural as to be realistically inconceivable. An illustration occurs in the fourth chapter of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, wherein the various members of the Chuzzlewit family are portrayed as they gather vulture-like at the Blue Dragon in anticipation of the death of old Martin. Of course the humor of the exaggeration is unmistakable, but in spite of the distinctness of the portrayal evidenced in such details as Mr. Spottletoe's luxuriant whiskers, old Anthony's sharpness of feature, the acerbity of the spinster daughters, the vagueness of the young nephew's features, and the "spottiness" of Mr. George's general appearance, it may be questioned whether all the figures thus indicated are, after all, models of clear presentation.

### Unity

In the presentation of character, unity, as well as clearness, is an important consideration. In depicting the *dramatis personæ* unity is secured by the dominance of one character or of one set of characters. Personages of equal importance crowding the narrative are like the chorus on the stage: they serve the purpose of background; they may supply substance and increased effect; but they are not all-sufficient. They are like setting, in that they do not exist for their own sake. The confusion that attends the want of dominance on the part of one character or of one set of characters often appears in the work of Dickens, where personages that are, in fact, subordinate are so fully elaborated as to usurp the place properly belonging to the principals, and dramatic unity is lost. To cite *Martin Chuzzlewit* once more as an example, while there may be no doubt as to who holds the

title-rôle, yet so elaborate is the presentation of the three Pecksniffs, of old Martin, of Anthony and his undutiful son, of Mark Tapley, of Tom Pinch, of Mrs. Gamp, of the various Americans, that in reality young Martin Chuzzlewit himself fails to dominate the novel. *Middlemarch* has already been mentioned as a narrative lacking in unity (p. 5); the reader's interest is so divided between Lydgate and Rosamond, Dorothea and Ladislaw, Mary and Fred, that confusion results. In contrast to these one may consider *Vanity Fair* or *The Mill on the Floss*. That *Vanity Fair* is crowded with actors is apparent enough; yet, although Thackeray gave to the novel the sub-title "A novel without a hero," the reader does not fail to realize that Becky Sharp dominates all. Dobbin, Amelia, Jos Sedley, Rawdon Crawley, and others, it is true, play important parts; yet, as compared with *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Vanity Fair* furnishes an amount of concentration that is lacking in the story of Martin's fortunes. Similarly in *The Mill on the Floss*, there is no question as to the dominance of Maggie Tulliver, and the novel presents a one-ness of effect that *Middlemarch* does not possess.

From another point of view this same matter of relative values, of dominance, may be said to illustrate the principles of force, of emphasis. If of a dozen characters, eleven are subordinate to the twelfth, the twelfth will proportionately dominate the narrative and give to it unity of tone; but, at the same time, the mere fact of the subordination will heighten the effective presentation of that twelfth character, the hero; he will stand out more distinctly against the background of the subordinated eleven. *A Tale of Two Cities* at times offers a problem as to who is the real hero, and the unity of the story is for the moment open to question. Certainly Doctor

Manette, Charles Darnay, and Sydney Carton by turns share the honors; but, as the narrative progresses, uncertainty diminishes, and, although all the characters play their distinct parts, yet by degrees they become subordinated, and Carton is thrown into strong relief, — a relief more forceful by the very fact of the subordination. Unity is thus ultimately secured and emphasis follows.

The very idea of personality suggests unity: there can be no personality without individuality, — that is, oneness, isolation. Into every personality there may enter many traits common to all men, but it is the peculiar combination, or unification, of these traits that constitutes the individual. Macbeth, Cæsar, Iago, Claudius of Denmark, Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Stryver, Beatrix Esmond, Becky Sharp, Mrs. Mackenzie, — every one of these illustrates some phase of ambition, but with a difference in combination and a unity of effect that in each case results in characteristic personality. The “all around” man, as a study in character, is often a man without individuality, and presents few dramatic possibilities to the writer of narrative wherein character is to serve as an important element. This, however, should not be taken to preclude that ultimate one-ness that may be the result of “consistent inconsistency.” Macaulay’s characterization of Pitt is a case in point.

His was not a complete and well-proportioned greatness. The public life of Hampden or of Somers resembles a regular drama, which can be criticised as a whole, and every scene of which is to be viewed in connection with the main action. The public life of Pitt, on the other hand, is a rude though striking piece, a piece abounding in incongruity, a piece without any unity of plan, but redeemed by some noble passages, the effect of which is increased by the tameness or extravagance of what



precedes and of what follows. His opinions were unfixed. His conduct at some of the most important conjunctures of his life was evidently determined by pride and resentment. He had one fault, which of all human faults is most rarely found in company with true greatness. He was extremely affected. He was an almost solitary instance of a man of real genius, and of a brave, lofty, and commanding spirit, without simplicity of character. . . . Yet, with all his faults and affectations, Pitt had, in a very extraordinary degree, many of the elements of greatness. He had genius, strong passions, quick sensibility, and vehement enthusiasm for the grand and the beautiful. There was something about him which ennobled tergiversation itself. He often went wrong, very wrong. But, to quote the language of Wordsworth,

"He still retained,  
'Mid such abasement, what he had received  
From nature, an intense and glowing mind."

A common error of crude characterization lies in failure to catch the harmony that ultimately belongs to all of the conflicting traits taken in their entirety. It often appears in cases wherein some distinct phase of temperament is premised — as in the case of Colonel Newcome, for instance, or of the Reverend James Moore, or of William Pitt, — but where the writer, by introducing words and actions out of keeping with the premises, invalidates the totality of effect. The natural tendency to discover this agreement between character and its external manifestations is illustrated in the various critical estimates of Hamlet's personality, — a theme upon which much has been written. In the Prince one sees a madman; another, weakened will power; still another, a sensitive nature weighed down by moral responsibility. Each defends his particular thesis by attempting to demonstrate that every word, every act, is consistent with the personality set forth in the thesis. The actor in

his interpretation goes a step further: not only does he find the utterances of the Prince consistent with his conception of the part, but he delivers each word with appropriate action so as to accentuate and objectify his conception. A large part of the success that has attended the interpretation of dramatic characters by really great actors is due to the unity of the conception, the harmony between the word, the act, and the personality.

In connection with unity as an element in successful character creation, what is known as "point of view" — that is, method of approach — is an important consideration. Just as the Great Stone Face viewed from one spot "precisely resembled the features of a human countenance," and yet, "if the spectator approached too near, it lost the outline of a gigantic visage," and became "only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks piled in chaotic ruin one upon another," so the character that from one point of view is noble, pure, complete, becomes from another, ignoble, sensual, or dwarfed. In *The Choir Invisible*, as the Reverend James Moore preached from the text "My peace I give unto you," and looked down over his congregation of Kentucky frontiersmen, he saw "many a thing that no man knew he saw; he met the wild beasts of different souls, he crept up on the lurking savages of the passions." But to another observer these same souls "by their strength, their courage, patience, watchfulness, constancy, — by the inmost will and beholden face of victory had overmastered the evil within themselves as they had overmastered the peril in Kentucky." They were "dwelling in green and tranquil pastures where the will of God broods like summer light." They were the same personalities, but were viewed from different angles.

When Lancelot came to Astolat, in the eyes of Elaine, we are told,

Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man  
That ever among ladies ate in hall,  
And noblest;

yet when this same knight of the Table Round looked into his own heart and there saw the sinful shame of his love for Guinevere he thought

What am I? What profits me my name  
Of greatest knight? I fought for it and have it:  
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;  
Now grown a part of me; but what use in it? . . .  
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man  
Not after Arthur's heart!

We find the same thing illustrated in the pages of actual historical narrative. The Reverend Francis Thackeray, from the study of state papers and from the biographic data regarding William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, saw in his hero "not merely a great poet, *in esse*, and a great general, *in posse*, but a finished example of moral excellence, the just man made perfect." Macaulay, on the other hand, from the same data, concludes that "there scarcely ever lived a person who had so little claim to this sort of praise as Pitt."

In expounding character, the most careful writers approach the subject from some definite position, and portray the person under consideration as seen from the angle chosen. Macaulay, for example, in his portrayal of Sir Robert Walpole, writes:—

He was incorruptible by money. His dominant passion was the love of power: and the heaviest charge which can be brought against him is that to this passion he never scrupled to sacrifice the interests of his country.

The succeeding paragraphs, which elucidate the character of the great minister, are all drawn to this pattern. His conduct of the Spanish War, his shrewd political management of his own party, and his sustained battle against the Opposition, — all are elaborated in the light of the prefatory characterization. The reader never loses sight of Sir Robert's incorruptibility and passion for power.

In the biography of his wife, Alice Freeman Palmer, Professor Palmer, at the outset, states distinctly that he is impelled to write the book by three considerations:

Affection first of all. . . . Perhaps my grateful pen may bring to others a portion of the bounty I myself received. . . . A second and more obvious summons comes from the fact that in herself and apart from me Mrs. Palmer was a notable person. . . . At her death I received nearly two thousand letters from statesmen, schoolgirls, clerks, lawyers, teachers, country wives, outcasts, millionaires, ministers, men of letters — a heterogeneous and to me largely an unknown company, but alike in feeling the marvel of her personality and the loss her death had caused them. . . . And now these persons are recalling her influence and asking for explanation. . . . Accordingly, in response to many requests, I mean to make the second object of this book the study of an attractive human problem. . . . One more aim remains. . . . In some of the social movements of her time Mrs. Palmer had a considerable share. . . . As she was sometimes forced into leadership, she may be said to have a certain historical importance.

In what follows, — in this case, a character study by the narrative method, — the three impulses thus announced — “the instability of love, the general desire for portraiture, the rights of history” — are consistently kept before the reader. When he has read the biography, the loveliness of Mrs. Palmer, her influence, and her

leadership in the educational movements of her day remain as the three essential notes of the composition. They permeate and give individuality to the three hundred pages that constitute the biography. Unity of characterization is one of the most marked rhetorical elements of the work.

Without this initial definition of one's point of view there can hardly be unity of characterization. It may not be expressed with the formality that marks the biography just cited, but it must be felt. So many are the angles of reflection in every complex personality, that unless the writer moves by the guidance of a single ray he will lose his path. The student of argumentation in preparing his brief must weigh all the testimony for and against his contention, in order that by ultimate elimination of extraneous and irrelevant matter he may narrow his question down to the main issues and restrict his proof to the demonstration of these issues. Similarly the student of narration, in the process of characterization, must choose a definite position from which to approach his subject, and then, by the elimination of all extraneous, conflicting, or unharmonious matter, secure a portrayal that is characterized by one-ness and consistency.

The devices by which this unity of view may be secured are many. In *Henry Esmond*, for example, we see Beatrix and Lady Castlewood through the eyes of Esmond himself: we read his own personal memoirs, wherein all is presented as it appeared to him, the narrator. It is entirely conceivable that did we possess the memoirs of the Baroness Bernstein or the diary of Lady Castlewood, our conception of Beatrix's character might be so modified as to bear little resemblance to that presented in Thackeray's novel. And the private letters of Father Holt

might shake our confidence somewhat even in the consistent perfection of Colonel Esmond; they might, indeed, go far to refute the charge of priggishness so often laid at the Colonel's door.

As a matter of plot structure, that is, as a means of presenting effectively the various constituent events of the action, this device of making the principal actor in a story the narrator has many advantages. But as a means of characterization this first-person method is open to rather evident drawbacks. That its unchanging point of view insures unity is in its favor, but it precludes direct characterization of the main actor himself, and very materially limits all characterization, direct and indirect, of the minor figures as well. The narrator himself can hardly expound his own personality — certainly he will do so at the cost of becoming a bore. Consequently we must know him only as he is revealed to us through the medium of words, action, and the like. This appears in *Robinson Crusoe* and in most of Defoe's novels. As far as Crusoe is a personality rather than a personage at all, his various characteristics, such as his passion for adventure, his simplicity, kindliness, and loyalty to friends, are made evident through his acts, — his running away from home to undergo the dangers of a seafaring life, his daily reading of the Bible, his treatment of his pets, his pains to pay just debts.

There is about this first-person method a certain simple effectiveness and a distinct consistency, but it will scarcely serve the purposes of a narrative that seeks to characterize by rather careful analysis, to acquaint the reader thoroughly and in detail with the personality of the main personage. It would not be adapted, for example, to the purposes of George Eliot or to the modern psychologic school of fiction. Writers of this sort cannot

leave their characterization to inference: it must be deliberately set forth through careful exposition.

The difficulty in securing a satisfactory characterization of the main actor by this autobiographic method is sometimes met by a slight modification. The narrative is committed to one of the minor actors in the story, who plays Boswell to the hero's Johnson. In this way some of the disadvantages already indicated are obviated. But others arise. The author can indeed secure external comment, deliberate exposition, if need be, concerning the personality of his hero, and yet not sacrifice the unity that belongs to the device of the single narrator. At the same time, it may still be argued that loss in distinctness of characterization results from representing everything as seen through the eyes of a single actor.

In narrative literature outside of fiction this first-person device is common in letters, diaries, journals, and autobiographic discourse generally. Newman's *Apologia* is a classic instance of the narrative from the pen of the principal personage; Boswell's *Johnson*, of the modification wherein a subordinate becomes the chronicler. Literature of this order possesses a twofold value: Pepys's *Diary*, for example, serves as a repository for important historic facts occurring during a period of some ten years about the time of the Restoration; and it also presents the best possible data to the student who seeks to understand the individuality of Samuel Pepys himself. As a piece of characterization, the work in question possesses distinct unity from the singleness of its point of view; considered as a congeries of historic occurrences, trivial and significant alike, it would resolve itself into a study in plot structure.

However, a writer often desires to present his hero, not from a single point of view, but as standing at the

centre, the focus, of various avenues of approach. This does not preclude unity; it may well be that the truest understanding may be reached through the consensus of various considerations. Presentation from a single point of view, while it may aid unity, may yet not bring out all the delicate lights and shadows, the fine discriminations, that the author feels to be essential to the characterization. This may be secured in a variety of ways. It may come through an enlargement of the method already indicated in connection with *Henry Esmond*; that is, instead of confining observation and comment to one person, the narrative may be a composite of several such expositions. Stevenson's *Master of Ballantrae*, as far as it is a study of character, presents by this method a fairly complete portrait of the Master externally and psychologically through the narratives of Mackellar and of the Chevalier de Burke. Classic and highly elaborate examples of the same method are to be found in the epistolary novels of Samuel Richardson. Of his style Professor Raleigh writes:—

There is an incessant doubling back on what has gone before; first a letter is written describing "what has passed," this letter is communicated by its recipient to a third character, who comments on it, while the story waits. This constant repercussion of a theme or event produces a structure of story very like *The House that Jack Built*. Each writer is narrating not events alone, but his or her reflections on previous narrations of the same events. And so, on the next-to-nothing that happened there is superimposed the young lady that wrote to her friend describing it, the friend that approved her for the decorum of the manner in which she described it, the admirable baronet that chanced to find the letter approving the decorum of the young lady, the punctilio of honour that prevented



the admirable baronet from reading the letter he found, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent that in this method there is both value and danger: value, from the completeness of detail that belongs to the many-sided approach, constituting practically an intensive as well as an extensive study; and danger, from the possible want of harmony that may attend the various points of view. It is also apparent that if the writer elects this method of delineation he must visualize to himself very clearly in advance the character under consideration, so that he may secure convergence among the many rays that he turns on his picture.

The author may assume still a third attitude toward his work, — the wholly external point of view. He does not, as in the first case, identify himself with the principal figure of the narrative, nor does he assume in turn identity with the various figures, and thus, as one of the *dramatis personæ*, forward the process of characterization. On the contrary, he stands apart from the action. As the creator of the respective personages he assumes the rôle of omniscience. Physical barriers are to him as nothing; to his all-seeing vision time and space present no obstacles. He can see Arthur Donnithorne hastily conceal Hetty's tell-tale neckerchief at the Hermitage, yet Arthur is entirely alone. He leaps from Rotherwood to Sherwood Forest, from Defarge's wine-shop to Tellson's Bank, from Thomas Newcome's boyhood at Clapham to the later years of the old Colonel in India — and all within a page. Yet he draws to a scale, and presents a Cedric, a Carton, or a Colonel Newcome essentially individual and one. More than that, the heart and the inner soul are open pages to him; secret motives and un-

<sup>1</sup> Raleigh's *The English Novel*. By permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

spoken thoughts are as clear as the day. The inner struggle in the soul of Richard Feverel is as concrete and distinct to his penetrating vision as are the very towers of Raynham Abbey to his eye. This method of omniscience is the method of the psychologist and of the historian combined. Like Gibbon and Hume, the narrator follows the movements of his characters; and he expounds their innermost personalities with the analytic exactness of a James or a Meredith.

This method may be called external, as distinguished from the internal method whereby the writer, in presenting his characterization, identifies himself with one or more of his own creations. The external point of view, in turn, falls into two subdivisions, which we may term respectively the objective and the subjective. In objective external characterization the narrator's own personality is entirely out of sight. The reader gets no hint of approval or of disapproval of the characters as portrayed. The author's attitude is that of the historian, the judicial, unbiassed expounder of mere facts. It is the attitude of mind commended by Macaulay in his essay on Hallam's *Constitutional History of England* :—

His [Hallam's] work is eminently judicial. Its whole spirit is that of the bench, not that of the bar. He sums up with a calm, steady impartiality, turning neither to the right nor to the left, glossing over nothing, exaggerating nothing, while the advocates on both sides are alternately biting their lips to hear their conflicting mis-statements and sophisms exposed.

This attitude of absolute aloofness from the narrative, offering no hint of the author's own inclinations, is not uncommon with writers of fiction. *The Necklace* or *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* offers illustration. In neither of these stories do we find direct indication of

Maupassant or of Bret Harte, except as the style may reveal here and there certain individual turns of expression. Of the author's attitude to life, whether in sympathy with Madame Loisel's hard-won compensation or in condemnation of Oakhurst's career, there is no word.

A modification of this attitude of objective omniscience is to be found in those narratives in which the narrator, while not revealing his own individuality, yet limits his range of vision to that of some actor in the story. To take a very simple illustration, — when, in *Flute and Violin*, we see Parson James Moore in the privacy of his own room, clad in the evening dress of some bygone day and treading the measure of a minuet to the music of his own flute, we see him not from some far off vantage point of unlimited range, but through the slit in the window curtain of Arsena Furnace's room across the way. This modification of the wider field of view presents indeed a restricted range of characterization, but it may often happen that from its closer identity with the setting and the action it adds dramatic effect. In either case, complete unity of characterization is quite possible. With the wide range of unrestricted vision, as in *The Necklace*, the writer is at liberty to include or to exclude such details as will most completely portray the character in accordance with his conception. In the other case, illustrated by the scene from *Flute and Violin*, unity of a more restricted range may be secured, — the unity that belongs to the limited horizon of a single person.

In contrast to this objective characterization — the point of view by which the individuality of the creator is kept out of sight — is subjective characterization, wherein the writer's personality is frankly expressed. It is still external in the sense that the writer does not iden-

tify himself with any of the figures in the narrative; but now at each interposition of himself there is a sudden change in the current of the action, and the writer for the moment occupies the scene that has been filled by his characters. Thackeray's proneness to assume this rôle of the mere showman, to reveal that he is but the puller of the wires, is well known, and to many readers is extremely disagreeable. He constantly halts the narrative and obtrudes himself in a way so personal as to destroy all illusion of reality. The following passage from *Vanity Fair* is typical: —

I warn my "kyind friends," then, that I am not going to tell a story of harrowing villainy and complicated — but, as I trust, intensely interesting — crime. My rascals are no milk-and-water rascals, I promise you. When we come to the proper places we won't spare fine language — No, no! But when we are going over the quiet country we must perforce be calm. A tempest in a slop basin is absurd. We will reserve that sort of thing for the mighty ocean and the lonely midnight. The present Chapter is very mild. Others — but we will not anticipate.

And, as we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform, and talk about them: if they are good and kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand: if they are silly, to laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve: if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of.

Otherwise you might fancy it was I who was sneering at the practice of devotion, which Miss Sharp finds so ridiculous; that it was I who laughed good-humoredly at the reeling old Silenus of a baronet — whereas the laughter comes from one who has no reverence except for prosperity, and no eye for anything beyond success. Such people there are living and flourishing in the world — Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and

very successful too, mere quacks and fools: and it was to combat and expose such as these, no doubt, that Laughter was made.

While it is the feeling of many modern historians that in the chronicling of facts the writer should efface himself and present a purely impersonal statement of events, yet in characterization, as well as in the ordering of facts, the historian frequently assumes the attitude of which we have seen illustration in Thackeray. Like other experts, he has reached his own theory as to men and motives, and the narrative becomes, for the moment, an exposition of that theory. Macaulay, for instance, in his characterization of great men usually holds a brief either for the defence or the prosecution. In the biography of Macaulay in *English Men of Letters* the author says: —

He allowed himself to cultivate strong antipathies towards a number of persons — statesmen, soldiers, men of letters — in the past, and he pursued them with a personal animosity which could hardly have been exceeded if they had crossed him in the club or the House of Commons. He conceived a contemptuous view of their characters; his strong historical imagination gave them the reality of living beings, whom he was always meeting “in the corridors of Time,” and each encounter embittered his hostility. Marlborough, Penn, and Dundee (in his *History*), Boswell, Impey, and Walpole (in his *Essays*), always more or less stir his bile, and his prejudice leads him into serious inaccuracies.<sup>1</sup>

Of course it is to be said that in the method of approach now under consideration there is certainly unity of characterization. The portraits are all presented from one consistent point of view — the author's. They are therefore marked by one harmonious

<sup>1</sup> Morrison's *Macaulay* in the *English Men of Letters*. Published by Harper and Brothers.

tone and are drawn to a uniform scale. The objection that many readers feel to the method — impatience at the constant interruptions of the action by the showman's obtrusion of himself in order to expound or to moralize — is rhetorically justified, but not on the ground of its being a violation of unity in characterization. It is the unity of the action or the coherence of the plot that receives an unpleasant check at these moments. The characterization of *Tess*, for example, is unified throughout by the attitude that the author takes toward her and her world. It is his purpose to depict her as essentially a pure woman, and the characterization is consistently carried out by his attitude to life — that men and women are but the playthings of an ironic Fate having out its little joke with them and throwing them aside as mere dross; that the world is a blighted planet, created and forgotten by some great Intelligence that knows not itself or its own power. This disheartening philosophy is kept persistently and consistently before the reader, and the characterization is in consequence thoroughly unified. Yet the reader is conscious of the author's presence throughout. The same thing is true of Thackeray's disgust with the sham-decent, of Macaulay's delight with modern material progress, of George Eliot's devotion to the altruistic formula, and to Hume's consistent belittlement of Christianity. In each of them we feel constantly the personality of the writer as well as that of the individual under consideration, and this very consistency of attitude toward the subject secures unity of characterization.

In order to objectify in concrete form what has been said regarding point of view, we may, by way of illustration, examine in some detail *Flute and Violin*.

During the first episode, the author does not obtrude himself to any extent. Save for a pervasive note of tenderness toward the Reverend James Moore, the chapter as a whole illustrates the attitude of the historian: the point of view is that of omniscience. The writer presents the parson as moving among his parishioners, seen of all men, and again in the privacy of his own room where not even the prying eye of curiosity could reach him. We even know the thoughts that run through the musician's mind as in the darkness he blows the roll-call of his wandering faculties and dismisses them for the night. In only a single passage are we aware of the writer's own personality, — when in alluding to the parson's posthumous fame he exclaims, "How many of our fellow creatures are learned without being amiable, amiable without being pious, and pious without having beautiful manners." In this mild bit of cynicism the reader catches distinctly the voice of Mr. Allen, who otherwise keeps in the background.

Episode II, as a whole, continues the all-seeing point of view that characterizes the first part of the story; but with noteworthy modifications. The reader suddenly in the third paragraph finds himself following the parson's actions from the point of view of Arsena and the Widow Spurlock on the floor below his room, and afterwards from the widow's point of view alone. A few paragraphs later this shifts to Arsena's window across the way. From one or the other of these two places of vantage we follow him until the close of the section, when the narrator once more resumes the *rôle* of omniscience.

There would seem to be in this portion of the narrative some confusion as to the positions from which the parson is characterized, — a want of consistency arising

from a mingling of the omniscient and the personal points of view. But this seeming inconsistency is not essential. The attitude of omniscience is in reality maintained throughout. The plot is made to follow the movements of the parson's two admirers, and thus the limited horizon of Arsena Furnace and the Widow Spurlock is only a part of the wider view with which the action begins, and there is no such interruption as would occur if suddenly the author were to pass from the external to the internal, from the objective to the subjective.

In the third episode the characterization passes from the Reverend James Moore to the little cripple, David. At the outset it would seem that the narrator portrays the boy from the point of view of some passer-by who observes him as he sits by the roadside lost in the ecstasy of his imaginary music. But when the parson approaches it is apparent that the outlook is wider, for we are informed as to the subject-matter of the good man's prayers; we see the very thoughts that pass through his mind as he catches sight of David and thinks of the death-bed three years before, when his dying friend had committed to his care the fatherless boy; and we look, too, into David's mind as the parson passes on, as also again later when the boy estimates the chances of his ever coming into possession of Tom's violin, and still later when he is filled with intense longing to see the wonders of Ollendorf and Mason's elegant collection of wax figures. It is apparent from all this insight that the writer is still presenting his characters from the omniscient point of view, and is standing quite apart from the characterization.

As far as section IV can be called a study in characterization at all, it has to do with young Leuba, an unprepossessing figure. The self-absorption that seems



to be this young gentleman's most distinctive trait is presented through the indirect medium of his words and actions. We may assume that the author still maintains the attitude of omniscience: it would appear that he can read in Tom's mind the motives that actuate him when he accepts David's apology for interrupting the rendition of "O Thou Fount of every Blessing" for the sake of the accompanying praise of his masterly execution. Still, however, the portraiture is wholly objective.

The episode chronicled in the next section, the fifth, is largely emotional in its purpose, being primarily intended to arouse sympathy for David in his pathetic longing to enjoy what all his friends seemed able to enjoy. Within it, however, are two or three touches of further character elaboration, especially in the opening paragraph where the writer maintains the attitude of one who can penetrate the inner self and can read the heart. For a moment, in the ejaculation "Poor little fellow!" he almost rises above the coldly objective level to that of subjective interpretation; but the change in the point of view is of the slightest and only momentary.

It would seem that the sixth section were given over to the advancement of the plot rather than to the elaboration of the parson's character, but for the sake of the analysis we may assume that Mr. Moore's elation and temporary forgetfulness of his little ward do definitely advance our insight into his personality. We may therefore consider the author's method of approach. We see the parson from at least seven different angles: on the street, ejaculating to himself a silent prayer against undue exaltation of spirit; alone with the widow within the new church, where we may be sure that no eye can see them; again, on the street, transported quite out of him-

self and forming his bold resolution in case of any possible repetition of his recent experience; then, in the store with Mr. Leuba, where we have no reason to believe that any third person was witness to the music-dealer's unwonted generosity; later still, at the dinner; after that, with his company of "soiled lambs" at the wonderful exhibition; and finally, in his room, as already portrayed in the opening episode. The parson in all of these situations, save at Mr. Leuba's house and at the Museum, is portrayed as by one whose vision is unlimited: we penetrate into the very sanctuary of the clergyman's secret thoughts; the walls of the new church present no barriers; we pass into Mr. Leuba's house unseen. Not until the closing paragraph, however, is there any hint of the author, but there he comes forward into the position of showman and speaks subjectively in his own person: —

Is it possible that on this day the Reverend James Moore had driven the ancient, rusty, creaky chariot of his faculties too near the sun of love?

The seventh chapter is, like the fourth, primarily for the further elucidation of the plot, and yet it contains no little characterization of David, both by direct and indirect means. The point of view follows the little cripple's movements from the time of his rising in the morning until his arrival home in the evening, feverish and heart-broken. At times it would seem that the narrator were a bystander, observing the boy's actions, as at the door of the Museum when the temptation and the fall occurred. Again, it almost seems as if the author were causing the story to pause and were speaking *in propria persona* by way of comment, as when he queries of the thoughts passing through the mind of the boy concealed

in the clump of iron-weeds by the abandoned rope-walk.

Slowly the moments dragged themselves along. Of what was he thinking? Of his mother? Of the parson? Of the violin that would now never be his? Of that wonderful sorrowful face which he had seen in the painting? The few noises of the little town grew very faint, the droning of the bumblebee on the purple tufts of the weed overhead very loud, and louder still the beating of his heart against the green grass as he lay on his side, with his head on his blue cap and his cheek in his hand.

But we may take the chapter in its entirety as from the view-point of one to whom everything is known. We catch his murmured thoughts as he sees the parson pass by with his band of young *protégés*; we know the thoughts of shame and terror that inspire him as he escapes from the town; we see him — although it is dark — peeping through the palings at the patient mother within the house. The point of view is still that of omniscience, and we may fairly view the interrogations as to what were his thoughts while he lay hidden in isolation, as a mere rhetorical device and as no indication that we could not penetrate his heart, if we would.

In the closing episode we have, perhaps, the most effective characterization of the Reverend James Moore to be found in the story. His stricken conscience, his anxiety regarding the possible moral motives underlying the boy's desire to visit the Museum, his cold and severe abnegation of future marital possibilities, — these and all the indications of the parson's chastened heart are revealed to the reader as by one to whom all secrets are known. Upon completing the story, we feel that we have sounded the very personality of the Reverend James Moore: all the details of the action have contributed to the exposi-

tion; and the various contributing elements have combined to produce a consistent and complete individuality. Much of the consistency and general unity of effect has come from the sustained point of view, — that of the omniscient observer to whom all motives are as clear as outward acts, but who himself remains unseen.

### Coherence

Unity of characterization, then, is found in consistency of portrayal, in the subordination of the various constituent elements to the individuality as a whole. Coherence of characterization is secured by consistency of development. Unity has to do with the complete personality; coherence, with the successive steps that contribute to that personality. In one sense, unity is static; coherence, progressive. Coherence of characterization, then, would seem to be best exemplified in those narratives where personality grows with the successive incidents that constitute the action. It therefore finds its most perfect expression in the novel, which, as will be shown later, is becoming more and more recognized as a record of personality.

Personality is not born in a moment; it is developed. Owing to the exigencies of limited space, the item, and even episodic narrative as found in the short-story, offer scant field for character evolution. And at this point one should differentiate between character exposition and character evolution. In the one case the narrator elucidates personality as it is; in the other he traces it as it grows. In *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, for example, the characters of the principal personages are already established when the personages themselves are introduced to the reader. Uncle Billy is already essentially selfish and villainous; the events following the banish-

ment from the Flat do not change him. Oakhurst and the Duchess are already outcasts, but are differentiated from Uncle Billy in their possession of an underlying humanity that a common danger and unsuspecting innocence bring to the surface. It cannot be said that they are *developed* by the peril of the storm and by the simplicity of Piney and Tom. Indeed the story is a revelation of character rather than a narrative of development in character. Now if *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* be placed by the side of *The Necklace*, an essential difference between the two narratives will at once be evident. *The Necklace* is an instance, to be sure, of the short-story in very brief form, but observe the personalities of the principal actors. At the outset Madame Loisel is a pretty girl, — superficial, ambitious of admiration, loving above all else the delicacies and luxuries of social life. After a few brief pages, beauty and delicacy give way to frowsiness, coarseness, and depression. The young woman whose dream had been of flattery and gaiety now, with red hands and skirts askew, washes the floor and talks in strident tones with the neighbors over their work. Yet all this change comes naturally enough, though in brief space. To be sure, the traits that lead the heroine to sacrifice ambition in the determination to pay her just debts must have been latent from the outset, but, under the unhappy consequences that followed the borrowing of Madame Forestier's necklace, the personality of Madame Loisel distinctly changes, develops into something new, — all in a manner totally unlike the case of Uncle Billy and Oakhurst. In the sequence whereby this change is brought about without offence to the reader's judgment lies the coherence of the narrative as far as the element of characterization is concerned.

Almost any novel in which character rather than action is the motive offers more striking illustration of the same structural principle. In *Silas Marner*, for example, Silas himself, Godfrey Cass, and Eppie show character evolution under the stress respectively of changing environment, blighted hope, and maturing years. In Silas at least four distinct and successive stages of character growth are distinguishable: (1) religious enthusiasm; (2) miserly isolation; (3) parental anxiety; (4) peaceful age. Yet the passage from one stage to the other is accomplished without offence to the reader's sense of conviction.

But sequence is not impossible in those narratives where the various episodes are separated by distinct lapses of time, the transition from one to the other not being bridged. To illustrate from the drama: any one who ever witnessed Mansfield's *Beau Brummel* will realize how it is possible to pass from one period of a hero's life to another, over the chasm of many years, and yet not lose the sequence that makes them essentially parts of one whole. The scene in which the hero appears at the close, bowed down by years and privation, is far enough in time from that in which he has just appeared, vigorous and in the height of his powers; yet the two are entirely congruous and coherent.

This same example illustrates also the principle that unity and coherence of characterization go hand in hand. The successive stages of the evolution, although not following, it may be, in uninterrupted series, must be so essentially consistent one with another that the reader will feel the underlying one-ness. Whenever he hesitates and questions the premises underlying the characterization the thread of development is broken and coherence is lost. The characterization of Uriah Heep in *David Cop-*

*perfield* would offer an illustration in point. From the time when we first see his cadaverous face at the small window of Mr. Wickfield's house until he is ushered into our presence as "Number Twenty-Seven" in Mr. Creakle's establishment of converted criminals, Uriah Heep is a consistent hypocrite. At each successive episode of the story, separated as many of them are by considerable intervals of time, he is true to his original characterization. But there is more than mere unity in the portrait. He grows. As junior member of the firm of Wickfield and Heep, he is a deeper scoundrel, a more finished villain, than when he was a mere clerk. His career is climactic and exemplifies uninterrupted moral degeneration. Coherence of characterization, as well as unity, is a distinct rhetorical quality of the narrative.

It is this unity-in-coherence that often baffles the amateur in narrative writing. He rapidly passes from one stage to another in the career of his hero, but we are not conscious of the thread of connection, and the result is a series of distinct personalities. This is true of the boyish attempt already quoted (pp. 128-31), where among many faults entire loss of character sequence is noteworthy in the gaps that mark the development of the hero. If he is indeed "crazy" at the outset, then the interest that in the second part should attend the pathetic (?) picture of a mind shattered by grief and disappointed love fails to be aroused, and we have merely the ravings of a maniac. If, on the other hand, the assertion of the hero's crazed condition is merely hyperbolic and if, in reality, the isolated life is the consequence of Marie's obduracy, then the changes of three years — the transition from a youth strong and vigorous to an old man with white hair, sunken cheeks, and all the external signs of senile decrepitude — are inartistically sudden. In the

hero of part II there is no logical, no natural connection with the hero of the opening paragraphs. With this crude narrative contrast *Rip Van Winkle*, wherein the bond of coherence is clear enough between the good-natured but lazy village-idler and the aged pilgrim that tells his tale to every stranger at Doolittle's Hotel. We are not conscious of jolt or jar, even though the story moves over a gap of twenty years.

Of course even the most extended and complete narrative in which character plays a part must be of the epitome order. The story of a personality whose evolution demands perhaps two generations must be condensed within the limits of a single volume. The gradual changes of even ten years, as in *The Necklace*, must be narrowed down to as many pages. Selection, therefore, is of the first importance, and in his ability to choose the data that determine a changing personality lies no small part of the writer's genius. The gradation must be natural, smooth, convincing.

The extent to which character portrayal in narrative writing may be carried varies from the simple account in which the actors are merely presented without elaboration — as in the newspaper item — to those novels that are practically elaborate studies in psychologic exegesis. In all forms of historic composition this expository extreme is practically impossible on account of the very purpose of the narrator, — the chronicling of actual *events*. The narrative may pause from time to time while character is elaborated for the better understanding of the facts under consideration, — as, for example, when Green pauses in his *Short History of the English People* to present his famous picture of Queen Elizabeth in feature and character, — but the reader always feels that the portraiture is but a pause in the more serious



business of the narrative. In fiction, however, characterization plays a relatively more important part than in the actual chronicle, and the extent to which characterization may be carried is well illustrated in such typical studies of personality as *Daniel Deronda*, or *The Egoist*, or *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. These come close to what Marion Crawford has included in the term "novels-with-a-purpose," and of them he says:—

Probably no one denies that the first object of the novel is to amuse and interest the reader. But it is often said that the novel should instruct as well as afford amusement, and the "novel-with-a-purpose" is the realization of this idea. We might invent a better expression than that clumsy translation of the neat German "*Tendenz-Roman*." Why not compound the words and call the odious thing a "purpose-novel"? The purpose-novel, then, proposes to serve two masters, besides procuring a reasonable amount of bread and butter for its writer and publisher. It proposes to escape from my definition of the novel in general and make itself an "intellectual moral lesson" instead of an "intellectual artistic luxury."<sup>1</sup>

Applying the principle underlying this judgment to the rhetorical aspects of narrative writing as exemplified in recent psychological fiction, we may well ask whether many of the so-called "modern novels" do not belong essentially to the domain of exposition rather than to that of narration.

<sup>1</sup> Crawford's *The Novel: What it is*. Copyright, 1893. By permission of The Macmillan Company.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ORDERING OF THE ACTION: PLOT

#### DEFINITIONS

THE word *plot* as used in connection with narrative writing has two distinct, but allied, meanings. Etymologically it is associated with the Anglo-Saxon *plot*, "a piece of ground," and in the allied sense, "a ground plan," it signifies no more than the clear conception of his work in its totality as it exists in the mind of the composer, or the sense of completeness and unified purpose of which the reader is conscious as he reviews the finished work. Thus the biographer "plots" his composition when he selects the specific aspects of his subject that his finished work is to develop, — deepened character, perhaps, or the ultimate attainment of an ideal; the historian "plots" his narrative when he deliberately shapes the story of chronicled events, unifying his data and making for a definite goal, — to demonstrate, it may be, how a true democracy has gradually been evolved from original absolutism or how a national tradition has been an underlying influence in the growth of a state. In accord with this principle it was that Dr. Allen "plotted" his biography of Phillips Brooks, and Bancroft planned his well-known history of the United States.

The student of rhetorical principles will see that in this sense of the word *plot* is merely unity of purpose combined with preliminary outline or plan. It is to the narrator what the brief is to the forensic writer. The debater in advance sees his goal, grasps the exact proposi-

tion the truth of which he wishes to impress upon his judges. The ordering of his proof, the proper place of refutation, the relative weights of various arguments, their logical relations, — all these he must appreciate at the outset, and upon the “plot,” or plan, thus formulated he bases his ultimate appeal with all its persuasive enrichment. Similarly the narrator sets in due order his various episodes, planning in advance the most effective sequence, the repression of the climax in the interests of suspense, the adjustment of cause and effect, the correlation of similar forces, the development of setting and character, and the ultimate revelation of the end toward which all parts in turn have contributed.

Some writers modify their method to the extent that, given a starting-point, they allow the plan to unroll itself as the action advances, and “plot” is not apparent until toward the end. Thus it often was, in considerable degree, with Dickens and Scott, natural story-tellers both; yet the reader is aware of a unity of conception that permeates the finished whole. When, for example, one looks back over the course of *Martin Chuzzlewit* or *Nicholas Nickleby*, one realizes how an apparently loose narrative is in reality a mosaic of thoughts, words, and acts, at times of seeming insignificance, yet combining to form a pattern fairly complete, unified, homogeneous. And even so rambling a story as the adventures of the Pickwick Club presents in retrospect something of method and coördination of parts. This completeness constitutes what etymologically may be called the “plot” of the narrative.

Still other writers seem to have no distinct formulation, no conception of work unified in its entirety. They take up successively the various ideas suggested by the immediate incident of the moment, but they seem to

make for no definite goal. They apparently have as much difficulty in rounding their material into a well-defined conclusion as Defoe had in closing out his bi-weekly *Review*, when, after having pronounced its valedictory on at least two occasions, he proceeded to advertise its reappearance as a tri-weekly. The reader of Bourrienne's *Memoirs of Napoleon* is offended by this seeming vagueness of concentration, and questions the plot significance of data as they are introduced. In the domain of fiction, Smollett frequently betrays the same tendency; instead of having in mind a well-formulated plan of action he appears to write with the purpose of merely filling space, and to stop only when he has reached a prescribed number of pages, not because he has arrived at any definite conclusion.

But, perhaps through association with another word, *complot*, the term "plot" has taken to itself a second signification. *Complot* suggests the idea of *complication* (Latin: *complicare*), as of strands woven together into a pattern. And in this sense we find the word "plot" conveying the generally accepted idea of intricacy of detail, of a complex pattern made up of various threads of action combining in ultimate unity of design. Using the word with this signification, one says of a story that it is well written but has no real "plot." Being interpreted, this signifies that the narrative is simple in construction, not a complex tissue of entanglements leading to an unexpected *dénouement*. In this everyday sense biography would possess little or no "plot"; a detective story, admirable "plot"; a history of the Jewish people would be but a simple chronicle without complication, whereas the story of Haman and Mordecai in the court of Ahasuerus would, because of its involved narrative structure, be well "plotted" and allied to the short-story or even to the drama.

Now if we revert to the definition of narration, we shall see the exact aspect of "plot" with which we must be concerned. If narration be the arrangement in chronological order of the successive details that constitute an event, we have thus far concerned ourselves with what are, to a certain degree, narrative accessories: that is to say, setting has to do with the background against which the action is projected for its greater effectiveness; character concerns the agents by and through whom the action is presented. There is still left the ordering of the action itself as presented by the characters against the background. Complicated this action may be or simple, but before it can be presented it must be intelligently set in order, and this ordering of the events, this deliberate planning of the constituent details of the action constitutes what rhetorically is known as plot.

A little consideration will show that in fictitious narrative there is greater likelihood of complication in the articulation of plot elements, in the ordering of the details of action, than in the chronicling of mere facts. This may be because in veritable narrative, — as exemplified in historical or biographical literature, — there is more of the expository process of setting forth facts whose virtue is in themselves. The attitude of mind with which one approaches a biography of Charles Dickens is radically unlike that with which one approaches the story of David Copperfield's career. And the difference proceeds from the fact that literature has two aspects, — the intellectual and the emotional, — and because these vary in proportion in different types of composition. The reader of the biography is actuated mainly by the intellectual impulse; he seeks a record of actual occurrences. The biography, to be sure, will not rank as a work of true literary merit unless it possesses something of emotional

appeal,—all literature must possess that,—but in the biography the intellectual impulse will be uppermost. In other words, the biography is largely an elucidation for purposes of information. Consequently clearness is the primary essential, and plot will be limited in great degree to the systematic presentation of facts in the order most effective for purposes of lucidity; and this is naturally the simple order of occurrence. In the novel, on the other hand, the whole situation is different. It is no longer intellectual, but emotional interest that is uppermost. The reader does not follow the fortunes of David and Steerforth and Peggotty in order to establish facts, but from interest in their various adventures, sympathy with Dickens's attitude to life, admiration of his wonderful insight into character, or from some other emotional appeal. Clearness is no longer so much the essential quality as are those elements that contribute to sustained interest, which is always piqued by complication, by suspense, by mystery. It is not difficult to see, therefore, that in planning the scheme of action the writer of what we may call emotional narrative is more likely to resort to complexity of plot structure than is the writer of intellectual narrative.

#### RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN PLOT STRUCTURE

In the various phases of narrative writing unity and coherence have already been pointed out as the two most essential rhetorical qualities; in plot structure their relative importance remains unchanged, although to them emphasis must be added. To these clearness, proportion, and selection are so closely allied that they may be considered as they naturally arise in the discussion of the more important elements.

## Unity

### (a) *Definition of Plot Unity*

Unity of plot structure, like all phases of this particular quality, implies uniformity amid complexity, the convergence of all details upon one common nucleus-idea — in other words, definiteness of purpose. Unity of plot may be considered from two points of view, — the intellectual and the emotional. That is to say, there is a unity in the concrete details that furnish the substance of the record, and there is also a unity of feeling, which permeates the narrative and gives it individuality. The one secures compactness of structure; the other, distinctness of emotional effect. The whole subject of unity in structure is summed up in a paragraph of Stevenson's *A Humble Remonstrance*, often quoted in this connection. The author, in offering helpful advice to the young writer, says : —

The best that we can say to him is this: Let him choose a motive, whether of character or passion; carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed shall bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast; avoid a sub-plot, unless, as sometimes in Shakespeare, the sub-plot be a reversion or complement of the main intrigue; suffer not his style to flag below the level of the argument; pitch the key of conversation, not with any thought of how men talk in parlours, but with a single eye to the degree of passion he may be called on to express; and allow neither himself nor any character in the course of the dialogue to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved. Let him not regret if this shortens his book; it will be better so; for to add irrelevant matter is not to lengthen but to bury. Let him not mind if he miss a thousand qualities, so that he keeps unflag-

gingly in pursuit of the one he has chosen. Let him not care particularly if he miss the tone of conversation, the pungent material detail of the day's manners, the reproduction of the atmosphere and the environment. These elements are not essential: a novel may be excellent and yet have none of them. . . . And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity. For although, in great men, working upon great motives, what we observe and admire is often their complexity, yet underneath appearances the truth remains unchanged: that simplification was their method, and that simplicity is their excellence.<sup>1</sup>

"To add irrelevant matter is not to lengthen but to bury," and even the most complicated form of narrative writing, the novel, is to "stand or fall by its significant simplicity": in these words lies the seed of the whole matter of unity in plot. It is only when the reader grasps the bearing of every thought, the direct contribution of the various items, that he realizes the plan of the work in its entirety, that he appreciates its "significant simplicity." Every student is familiar with this truth. He undertakes to follow, it may be, the history of literature in England during the nineteenth century, and he reads, perhaps, Saintsbury's *History of Nineteenth Century Literature*. The detailed array of names, titles, dates, and contributory influences confuses him; no common bond of relation seems apparent; he cannot coördinate or subordinate them in definite order; complexity and confusion seem everywhere present. Yet familiarity with the subject, aided, it may be, by some brief but systematic compendium, soon brings order amid seeming

<sup>1</sup> Stevenson's *Memories and Portraits*. By permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.



chaos and the well-ordered unity of a literary period becomes evident. So with extended and complicated fiction. When one has mastered the details that constitute, let us say, one of the early Victorian novels, he realizes a unity of purpose as well as a unity of action that gives them added interest and makes them simple enough. Just so long, however, as much of the subject-matter seems irrelevant, so long will unity be lacking and interest will flag. If the narrative writer would give to his plot the definiteness of direction that we call unity, he must rid it of all details that do not contribute distinctly to the actual purpose of the work; or, from another point of view, he must make clear the relevancy of all that he includes.

From this it is evident that the two fundamental processes underlying unity of plot construction are selection and elimination. Whether it be a biography of so commonplace a man as John Bunyan or a romance of wild adventure on the Spanish Main, the writer must choose those details that with most concreteness and emotional effectiveness set forth his central theme; and he must, on the other hand, avoid those details that by triviality or incongruity would tend to obscure that theme. Due attention to the concrete events that enter into plot is relatively an important consideration, because concreteness of detail concerns not only unity but clearness and effectiveness as well.

Examples of effectiveness in selection as well as in judicious omission abound in the simple narratives of the Bible. The story of Naaman the leper, as chronicled in 2 Kings, v, is a case in point. The plot of this brief narrative centers about a twofold episode, which may be summed up in a single sentence: *Elisha, the Man of God, heals Naaman of his leprosy; and smites his own*

*servant, Gehazi, with the Syrian captain's disease.* The various events that the author selects for the elaboration of this story are not numerous; the primary episodes are but six in number: —

1. The circumstances that led Naaman to seek Elisha's aid;
2. Naaman's arrival at Elisha's house and his reception;
3. The manner of Naaman's healing;
4. His gratitude and departure;
5. Gehazi's pursuit of Naaman;
6. Gehazi's return and punishment.

Not one of these episodes is in any way digressive; each contributes directly toward building up the main event of the story. The course of the main plot is concrete, direct, unified; and the same may be said of the constituent episodes of the second order; for example, of the initial episode and its subdivisions: —

1. The circumstances that led Naaman to seek Elisha's aid:
  - a. Naaman's position at court, and his affliction;
  - b. The little maid's report of Elisha's power;
  - c. The Syrian king's message to the king of Israel;
  - d. The Israelitish king's despair;
  - e. Elisha's confidence in his own power, and the reply to Naaman's master.

Here again the successive episodes combine into one definite unit and unerringly lead to the next episode, Naaman's arrival and reception by the prophet. The story moves consistently forward, without allowing the reader's attention to deviate from the direct line of action, and with the consequent unity come clearness of expression and dramatic effectiveness.

Yet while all these narrative details bear directly upon the story, it is to be noted that they are not exhaustive. Many others might have been included. The thought-

ful reader may well feel some slight curiosity as to possible details behind the bare statement that Naaman was "a great man with his master because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria." And the "little maid": certainly there is material for narrative elaboration in her implied story, for all we know is that the Syrian host had carried her away from her native land and that she now waited on Naaman's wife. What were the particulars of her capture and separation from her kindred? How came she to know of Elisha's wonderful healing powers? Had she, perhaps, personal knowledge of the prophet's dealings with the Shunammite woman? Then, too, the scene by the banks of the Jordan, when the Syrian captain, yielding to his servants, humbles himself and follows the command of the prophet, and before their very eyes the miraculous cure is effected: certainly here is matter for dramatic enlargement. But were these and other possible outlines filled in with details of descriptive and narrative embellishment, we may doubt whether the more elaborate result would possess the effectiveness of the simple original. It would certainly lack the unity that comes from the selection of a few essential, concrete, direct details.

But, as has already been explained (p. 183), the consideration of the mere concrete particulars does not exhaust the subject of plot unity. Not only must the conception of the event itself be definitely and clearly ordered, but often the emotional note, the atmosphere, of the narrative must be equally clear. Gibbon's tendency to belittle all forms of revealed religion, Hume's skepticism, Hardy's dreary philosophy of life, Macaulay's utilitarianism, Milton's majesty — these are but types of the emotional unity that characterizes all narrative writing possessed of what may be called indi-

viduality and rising above the mere chronicling of successive events in their order. Unity of this sort, entering into the very essence of plot organization, lies close to what is called individuality of style. On analysis this abstract emotional unity is found to depend largely upon masterly but unconscious selection by the writer: he chooses just those details that are consonant with the intangible thing known as personality; he rejects those that are discordant; and complete unity — alike concrete and abstract — characterizes his finished composition.

(b) *Unity in Complication*

Under unity of plot structure something must be said of complication, although the various methods of ordering details of the action are later to be taken up more particularly under the head of coherence. It will be recalled that the secondary meaning of the term "plot" turns on the association of the word with the allied term "complot," and connotes the idea of a woven pattern composed of many threads. Now a plot thread, or strand, we may define as any one of the various lines of action into which the main action itself may be resolved. For illustration we may revert to the narrative of Naaman and Elisha. The principal threads of this story are, in the first part, those of Naaman and Elisha, to which, in the second part, is added that of Gehazi. Subordinate threads of action are those of the "little maid," of Naaman's royal master, and of Jehoram, the Israelitish king. All of these individual strands are so interwoven one with another as to form in their totality a narrative pattern with entire harmony of effect. The more highly complicated story embodied in the *Book of Esther* furnishes a more detailed example of threefold plot. Here

we have the individual threads of Esther, Mordecai, and Haman, united into a considerably complicated piece of narrative writing. The structure of this particular instance of plot complication will be taken up in greater detail later.

Narratives consisting of a single plot thread are not common. Even in simple plot, consisting of a single main strand, threads of minor narrative importance are usually interwoven. The type would be represented as follows: the heavy horizontal line represents the single central narrative strand, and the finer lines the auxiliary

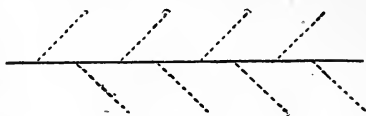


FIG. 2

strands that successively enter into the plot and incorporate with it. Such narratives are familiar in biographic sketches, and in stories of the *Robinson Crusoe* variety, — the “picaresque” type,<sup>1</sup> — in which the career of the hero, usually an adventurer, presents merely a central theme to which are attached the various events of the general action.

To sustain unity amid the complexity of threads forming a plot pattern is not easy, owing to the impossibility of representing coincident actions simultaneously. The writer’s task is to present a unified pattern, yet he is compelled by the exigencies of composition to develop but one thread at a time. The familiar instance from *Ivanhoe*, the siege of Torquilstone Castle, has already been referred to (p. 56). Scott’s problem is to secure a thoroughly unified plot picture, while at the same time following three distinct lines of action. The respective transitional chapter introduc-

<sup>1</sup> From the Spanish *picaro*, a rogue.

tions show how the author endeavors to cope with his problem: —

Leaving the Saxon chiefs to return to their banquet as soon as their ungratified curiosity should permit them to attend to the calls of their half-satiated appetite, we have to look in upon the yet more severe imprisonment of Isaac of York.

While the scenes we have described were passing in other parts of the castle, the Jewess Rebecca awaited her fate in a distant and sequestered turret.

What reader is not familiar with such types of phraseology as the following, all indicating the writer's consciousness that he must unify the reader's grasp of the various threads entering into the plot structure? —

While the events recorded in the preceding chapter were passing, the Marshal Almagro was engaged in his memorable expedition to Chili. — Prescott: *Conquest of Peru*.

The commander-in-chief, meanwhile, lay at Xuaxa, where he was greatly disturbed by the rumors which reached him of the state of the country. — *Id.*

It is now time to relate the events which, since the battle of La Hogue, had taken place at Saint Germain. — Macaulay: *History of England*.

While Wentworth was thus working out his system of "Thorough" on one side of St. George's Channel, it was being carried out on the other by a mind inferior, indeed, to his own in genius, but almost equal to it in courage and tenacity. — Green: *Short History of the English People*.

The difficulty lies in the fact that, if the individuality of the various narrative threads is greater than that of the main action in its totality, unity of effect is lost.

Of course plot structure is not usually dependent upon mere parallelism among the narrative threads. Complication could hardly result from such ordering. The strands constantly converge and diverge, now meeting, now parting. The points at which two or more narrative lines meet in a common action are known as "knots," and on their frequency depends the degree of plot complexity. Again to refer to the story of Naaman for illustration: we have a convergence of threads when the little maid tells her mistress of the wonderful healing power possessed by the Israelitish prophet. The threads of Elisha and Naaman meet when, as a result of the girl's words, the Syrian captain stands before the prophet's door and is directed to bathe in Jordan. There is a knot in the Naaman and Gehazi threads when the avaricious servant runs after the Syrian and asks of him gifts for the prophets of Ephraim. The outline of the story, with its successive principal strands and knot-complications, may be roughly represented thus: —

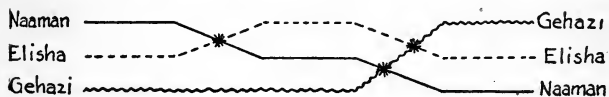


FIG. 3

In narratives of complicated plot structure the usual method of development presents the successive entangling of several knots followed by the "unknotting," or *dénouement*, as it is technically called, — in which the various mysteries and situations are resolved. In the type of narrative known as the "detective story" the procedure is modified to this extent: the story begins with plot complication already complete, and the *dénouement* constitutes practically the entire narrative. We have here indications

of what are really two radically different processes of construction. One may be called inductive, and the other deductive. By the inductive process the writer weaves his plot pattern, thread by thread and knot by knot, as he proceeds, ultimately producing the finished work. This is the method of the historian, the biographer, the chronicler. By the deductive process the writer places before the reader a completed pattern at the very outset, and then by a sort of analytic process shows how it was put together. This device is effective in that it arrests the attention to begin with, and then by successive complications endeavors to hold it through the *dénouement* process. Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* presents an interesting example of the two methods in combination. The story begins at Castlewood with a scene in which plot threads are already considerably complicated, and the reader's curiosity is speedily piqued as to young Esmond's relations to his surroundings. From this opening the plot advances for an entire chapter, then suddenly reverts several years and proceeds to build up the various complications that made possible the opening scene. When this has been accomplished, — and it takes some five or six chapters, — the narrative progresses along its regular course to the close. The method is attended by danger to plot unity unless the convergence of plot threads and the successive knot complications seem inevitable and become parts of a single well-defined pattern. The difficulty that has confronted many readers of *Esmond* is ultimately one of failure to grasp the unity of the plot scheme. If once the mutual relations of the various strands become evident, the course of the narrative proceeds smoothly enough, and interest does not flag. In fact, the secret of unity in structure lies in the ability of the writer so to organize the constituent parts



of the complex plan that they shall seem not complex at all but essentially one.

(c) *Point of View in Plot Structure*

In the consideration of unity as an element in plot structure point of view plays no small part. The attitude of the writer has already been discussed in its relation to characterization; it is no less important as an element in plot ordering. Character portrayal, we have seen, gains in consistency and completeness when its exposition is presented from a single definite angle, or, it may be, from a series of definite angles. So with the details that constitute action: the angle from which they are observed will have important bearing upon the totality of the final effect. The movements of the players in a football game produce wholly different impressions upon the spectator who knows little of the game and upon the coach who has trained one of the teams. To the one, the rapid movements that follow the kicking or the snapping of the ball are utter confusion: a mere welter of flying legs, violent concussions, and prostrate forms. To the other, this same confusion resolves itself into a thoroughly systematized tactical manœuvre: each player is sustaining his part in a preconcerted piece of strategy; instead of chaos there is order; unity and system characterize every movement. So it is with the organization of plot in narrative writing. The attitude of the writer to his facts has a far-reaching effect upon the ultimate unity of his plan.

More even than that: as in setting and in characterization, so in plot, variety in point of view — provided that it still be definite — will contribute largely to unity of effect. One is seldom content with viewing a cathe-

dral from the west front only; he must consider it at close range, now from one angle, now from another. He studies it perhaps from some more distant vantage-point as well, and from the various points of view in common he forms his complete conception of the great building,— nave, transepts, towers, all unite in one satisfying whole. In the same way, the historian and the novelist approach their narrative from changing — but ever definite — angles. A part of the adventures attending the rescue of the good ship *Hispaniola* will be given by Jim Hawkins, and still others by Doctor Livesey. We learn some of the details of the siege of the castle by looking through Rebecca's eyes and from the tower, but others by moving in person among the besiegers outside the walls. Yet the complete account will be thoroughly unified.

But unity is not the only characteristic served by maintaining a definite point of view — especially by the shifting point of view just set forth. When we order the details of action from more than one angle of observation, we secure a conception more varied and hence more interesting. The plot, thus, with increased unity, gains in force, or effectiveness, as is evident in the instances cited above, — the South Sea adventure and the affair at Torquilstone.

In expounding point of view as an element in characterization, it seemed best to approach the subject from (a) the angle of some personage in the narrative, (b) the focus of several angles, (c) the wholly external angle. In studying point of view in plot structure the student will find it sufficient to note simply temporal and spatial angles of approach. In relation to time, the narrator may place himself on some definite temporal vantage-ground and weave his plot threads and complications as

matters wholly of the past. In such cases he usually adopts the historian's impersonality toward the events chronicled. Of course he may modify this, as in the autobiographic method, the events still being treated as belonging to the past, the writer still participating in them to greater or less degree. These two attitudes are illustrated respectively in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield*: in the one the writer's position is objective; in the other, subjective. In cases of the latter sort we have increased vividness, and the reader feels as if he were in the very centre of the action. The effect is often highly dramatic; the sense of definite time is forgotten; the past merges insensibly into the present.

The spatial point of view is closely allied to the matter of setting, but the student of plot structure must not neglect it. The narrator views his arena as a spectator gifted with power to see every detail visible or invisible, or he is himself an actor — perhaps the protagonist himself — with the limited vision of actual life. Owing to the close relations that in fiction exist between action and character, the angle of omniscience is more likely to prevail in this type of narration. In the chronicling of historical events the author's attitude is a modification of the omniscient to the extent that it is the attitude of an authority whose pronouncements as to motives, causes, and results we may accept or reject at our pleasure. We may question, for instance, the narrator who tells us that the history of the English Church has been conditioned largely by certain Tudor characteristics in Henry VIII; but in *Esther* we do not question the sufficiency of the statement that "Haman *thought in his heart* 'To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?'" In this case, as well as in the case of the historian, we have the objective

point of view of one who stands apart and knows; but on the one hand we are in the realm of the intellectual; in the other, of the emotional.

An interesting study in point of view as an element in plot structure is presented by Balzac's story *La Grande Bretèche*. The narrative is, in the broad, an example of the first-person type of approach already noted on page 158, but this passes through many successive phases. At first it is largely a matter of setting. *La Grande Bretèche* is described as visible to the beholder — as yet quite impersonal — from the top of the neighboring mountain, from which he can look down upon the enclosure and observe the estate at large. Then the point of view changes to a closer inspection on the street side, through one of the numerous holes made in the old gate by the children of the neighborhood. Almost immediately, however, vagueness and impersonality are cast aside, and, in his own person, Monsieur Horace, the narrator, takes the stage, and by night, "defying scratches, makes his way into the ownerless garden" and contemplates it at leisure, straying about the grounds and indulging in orgies of imaginary adventure. But he is soon visited at the inn by the notary, Monsieur Regnault, who forbids further trespass on the deserted premises. At this juncture, although the story is still related in the words of the original narrator, the point of view becomes that of the notary, who garrulously recounts his experiences in the château at the death-bed of the late owner, the Countess de Merret. With this change, the attitude of approach shifts over from one of setting, and interest centres in action. But Regnault's horizon, while narrower in extent than what has preceded, is but general, after all, and the narrator speedily seeks to supplement the notary's story by that of some one to whom more details are known. Such in-

formation he readily finds in his landlady, Mother Lepas, a peasant woman, who, from her own experiences, adds materially to the revelations of the notary regarding the mystery of the château. Thus, with her narrative, the point of view again changes, and again becomes more concentrated in scope. Finally, convinced that he can yet penetrate the secret of the whole mystery of La Grande Bretèche by means of Rosalie, the servant at the inn and formerly in the employ of the Countess, Monsieur Horace gains the girl's confidence, and she ultimately tells him of the gruesome scene in which she personally was an actor. Thus the point of view changes for the sixth time, and is now concentrated on the very core of the story, the discovery by Monsieur de Merret of his wife's lover and the consequent adventure.

A further detail of structure characterizes Rosalie's story. While the account of the final details is hers, yet Monsieur Horace maintains the autobiographical attitude, giving her story in his own words and assuming the rôle of omniscience. For example, speaking of Monsieur de Merret, he says, "During dinner he [Monsieur] remarked that Madame de Merret was very coquettishly dressed; *he said to himself, as he walked home from the club*, that his wife was no longer ill, that her convalescence had improved her." Later on, "At the instant that he turned the knob of his wife's door, *he heard the closet that I have mentioned close*," etc. Again, when his wife replies that there is no one in the closet, "That 'no' *tore Monsieur de Merret's heart, for he did not believe it*," etc. And so on throughout the scene: we have details that Rosalie could not possibly have supplied, and that we can explain only on the omniscient basis, unless, perhaps, we assume that Monsieur Horace, while narrating Rosalie's experiences *in propria persona*, enlarged upon her ac-

count by supplying what seemed natural inferences from the data given by the girl.

The whole matter of plot unity, including point of view, complication, and all kindred questions, resolves itself, in the end, to a single process, in which selection and elimination are the main factors: namely, simplification. Simplification demands of narrative that it present but a section of life, not life in its entirety. No narrative, whether it concern itself with the life of an individual, as in Carlyle's *John Sterling*, or with the history of a nation, as in Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, can do more than approximate completeness in a very restricted degree.

Writers of imaginative narrative, particularly of the short-story, are forced to realize that the process of simplification is fundamental. Sometimes their method is even suggestive of the old unities of place and time, which limited the dramatist to the events of a single day and to the walls of a single city. Curious instances may occasionally be found in which the writer attempts to chronicle events as occurring approximately within the very time limitations required for reading the narrative itself, — but with dubious success. An instance of this oddity may be found in a story entitled *Forty Seconds*, by George R. Chester.<sup>1</sup> This is a breezy account of how a coasting party barely escape serious accident in the course of a winter's evening, the entire action falling between the time when they leave the top of the hill and suddenly arrive at the bottom after narrowly avoiding a steep declivity at the side. During the few seconds involved, characters are sharply revealed and vital relations affected. Such radical simplification as this is

<sup>1</sup> *Munsey's*: December, 1907.

attended by intensity and nervous force, it is true, but, after all, the method is at best a *tour de force*, and an extreme attempt to confine the narrative within artificial limits. Simplification of this extreme variety, or even of the sort that is characteristic of the short-story, is, of course, restricted largely to narrative of the non-historical order, for the restricted field of action is in great degree but a device to intensify the emotional appeal. At the same time historical narrative is not free from the restrictions of simplification; it is merely a matter of degree.

It follows that the problem of the episode is of no little importance to the narrative writer who would secure unity of plot structure. His single query must be: Will the inclusion or the exclusion of an episode contribute to the ultimate purpose of the composition, whether it be to serve an intellectual or an emotional end? In no case must the elaboration of the parts detract from the completeness of the whole.

### Coherence

Although generally synonymous, as indicating the consistent ordering of details, in the strictest sense *sequence* and *coherence* are not interchangeable terms as used in connection with narration. Sequence lays stress upon the mere succession of occurrences as they follow one another in chronological order. But coherence, with its implication of "sticking together," goes a step farther and connotes the additional idea of a logical relation between the narrative elements, a relation that in the matter of climax — to be taken up later — plays no inconsiderable part.

A distinctive peculiarity of narrative plot is the fact that it must progress definitely toward a goal. Note again

the fundamental definition: not merely the ordering of "events," but "of events that in their entirety constitute a transaction." That is, the mere setting down of details is not sufficient. Narrative, as Professor Baldwin has stated it in his *Manual of Rhetoric*, must not only move, it must *move on*. To take again as illustration the first part of the simple Bible chronicle of Naaman: the goal, the objective of all the details, is the healing of the leprous captain by the prophet. The first step of the episode is the leading away of the Israelitish maid into captivity. Through her, some time later, was communicated the fact (2) that in Samaria dwelt a mighty man of God who could, were he approached, heal her master of his leprosy. This chance remark was then (3) communicated by another servant to Naaman himself or to the Syrian king, who at once (4) despatched a letter to the king of Israel by the hand of his captain. Hereupon and in consequence, (5) the king of Israel was filled with despair, suspecting in the message merely the excuse for a quarrel and the spoliation of his kingdom. Hearing of Jehoram's despair, (6) Elisha sent for the Syrian to come to him, and in answer to the summons (7) Naaman speedily appeared at the prophet's door. Then follow in rapid succession, chronological and causal as well, (8) Elisha's message to Naaman as to bathing in the Jordan; (9) Naaman's scornful rejection of it; (10) his departure in a rage; (11) the appeal of his servants; (12) Naaman's final surrender to their common-sense protest; and (13) the culmination of the story, the miraculous healing. Here is the destination, the "arrival" of the narrative, to which it has steadily "moved on." Then succeeds the episode next in order, still bound by a logical link of causation as well as of temporal succession, — the awakening of Gehazi's



cupidity and the infliction of punishment by the outraged prophet.

### Climax

“Climax,” from its derivation (κλίμαξ, a ladder), implies ascent to a higher plane, progress toward an intellectual or an emotional goal. Examples of intellectual climax appear in expository or argumentative writing: the thesis or the forensic attains its climax when the writer succeeds in enabling the reader to occupy the same plane of knowledge with himself. Emotional climax is secured at the moment of greatest tension, — just as a mystery, it may be, is about to be cleared, or at the moment when conflicting forces are in equilibrium, or at the turning-point of a career. Climax connotes upbuilding, culmination. All details contribute to it; it stands at the apex. In historical writing this culmination has to do mainly with the completion of the action, with the totality of effect; in dramatic and story narrative, with the tension attendant upon a crisis. Take, for example, a record of Walpole’s administration from 1715 to 1742, unified by what, according to Macaulay, was the controlling motive of the great Prime Minister: lust of power. Such a record would differ from argumentation or exposition in that the writer’s purpose is not to establish a proposition or to make clear a fact, but to set in order definite historical data, all knit together by the alleged motive. Every narrative detail would contribute to the completeness of this chronicle, and the culmination would come only with the conclusion. On the other hand, in *Flute and Violin* the narrative is directed to a crisis in the hero’s career and to its ultimate effects upon his character. This crisis — the death of little David — is the common

centre of all the narrative threads, the culmination of the story; all that precedes this incident leads up to it, and all that follows branches away from it.

The following brief undergraduate theme affords a definite example of what is meant by climax as defined:

For the last two days of the voyage the sea had remained calm. Far over the horizon hung the smoke of an eastbound liner, — the *Philadelphia*, I heard one of the stewards tell a man. Now that all motion had practically ceased, the deck once again became popular, and strange figures that hitherto had remained below now appeared on the promenade, laughing and joking in the sea breeze.

A ship is like a great hotel, yet unlike a hotel in that each passenger, feeling the boat to be a little world, becomes eager to know his fellows. One has, therefore, little difficulty in picking up acquaintances that may last far longer than those gained similarly on land. It was with this fact in mind that I approached the chair of a young lady whom I had already noticed on several occasions, and who seemed to be traveling alone.

She looked up with a start; then, seeing who it was, she smiled and invited me to sit down. As I have said, she was young, — ridiculously young, it seemed, to be dressed in heavy mourning; yet there was about her something that indicated a rather unusually strong personality. She conversed with ease and assurance, and ultimately told me considerable of herself.

"My husband," she said, "was a wine merchant, and expert taster for the importing house of ——. We were married in America, and went to England last April on our wedding trip. We were so happy, — I cannot tell you how happy we were, until —" here she stopped, and, as I looked out over the water, I could hear her catch her breath.

Well, to make a long story short, her husband had died only a few weeks before, and now she was bringing back his remains. After this, we had several little talks, and I came to know quite a bit of her life.

When the declarations were handed about, I went over to

help her with hers. She smiled sadly and said, "Why, I have nothing to declare. I am bringing nothing in but —" and here she stopped and hid her face in her hands.

As I went away down the deck, I asked myself why this girl always recalled the fact of her husband's death in this rather marked manner. There was something unnatural about it, yet I could not specify what. All the people who had met her seemed to like her. Why should I, and without any reason, question her actions?

All was hurry and bustle on the dock as the baggage was lowered down the side. As no one was there to meet the girl, some of the passengers went to see her through the customs. The Inspector came along, holding her declaration marked "Nothing."

"Would you be good enough to let me have the key to the casket?" he asked.

At this the girl took a step backward, and began to cry.

A gentleman, stepping up, demanded what the man meant by such an outrageous request. But the Inspector was insistent, and added that unless the key were forthcoming he would break open the box.

At length with great reluctance she handed him the key.

He knelt down, turned the key in the lock, and threw back the heavy leaden cover.

The casket was filled to the top with ivory billiard balls!

An examination of narrative structures seems to indicate three rather clearly differentiated types of coherent method, distinguished from one another by their respective relations to the climax and its position in the complete work. These may be classified as (1) the method of chronicle; (2) the method of drama; and (3) the method of story.

#### (a) *The Method of Chronicle*

In the method of chronicle the climax is to be found in the completion of the detailed action as a whole, as

illustrated in the case of the Walpole sketch. Any succinct biography offers illustration of this method. The various episodes follow in coherent series and combine in the climactic effect of a complete historic event. No single crisis in the hero's life stands as a point for the complication of the various strands; rather the complete pattern itself represents the culmination of the narrative process. For example, we may take the biography of Alice Freeman Palmer. It may, in a sense, be said that her election to the presidency of Wellesley marked the climax of her career, but this does not constitute the narrative climax, or culmination. It was indeed an important event in her life-story, it marked the climax of her educational career, but with the attainment of this honor there did not come the attainment of that greater end, the perfect maturing of a great woman. This last was the goal ever in the mind of the biographer, and this is attained only with the close of the life; only at the end did her life culminate. Before final judgment could be pronounced, the narrative had to spread out in its entirety and include the useful years from 1887 to 1902, after the duties of the presidency had been laid aside.

It is in connection with this first method of ordering plot material — the method of chronicle — that we may note a real difference between the words *succession* and *series*. *Succession* connotes the mere sequence of chronological occurrence without necessary implication as to any chain of causation or other logical bond. It is typified in those lack-lustre tabulations annually published on December 31, wherein appear ordered lists of the events of the preceding twelve months. The want of coherence in such statistical narrative outlines becomes immediately apparent if one attempts to weave them together into a pattern: the necessary bond is wanting.

Very different would be the unified record, let us say, of the events that followed one another from the declaration of war between the United States and Spain in April, 1898, to the ratification of the treaty of peace ten months later. In this instance there would be a definite bond of causation between the successive occurrences; each would bear a definite relation to what went before; each would truly constitute an "event," in that it would "issue from" its predecessor. The *succession* of events would now become a *series*. It is this serial relation that enters intimately into the idea of narrative climax as the culminating point of plot. The serial relation will vary in intensity, it is true, from those chronicles in which the bond of causation is tenuous even to the degree of nebulousness, — as in narratives of the *Robinson Crusoe* order, — to those carefully elaborated histories in which each item bears its definite part in the general scheme, like Bancroft's *History of the United States* or Mommson's *History of Rome*. Yet it will be there and will give to the plot pattern such coherent substance as it may possess.

#### (b) *The Method of Drama*

From the simple marshaling of details that underlies the chronicle-method of plot structure we pass on to the second method, that of the drama. This is much more complicated and must be considered somewhat at length. For greater clearness of exposition we shall, in taking up the various characteristics of the method, exemplify each as it arises, by reference to the Old Testament story of *Esther*. This narrative, while simple, like almost all Scripture narratives, yet in rather remarkable degree illustrates the peculiarities of the type of structure under discussion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This same story has been utilized by Professor C. S. Baldwin in

The first thing to be noted in the organization of dramatic plot is that the narrative shall represent a struggle between two conflicting forces and the ultimate triumph of one over the other. These two parties to the action are technically known as *play* and *counterplay*, or protagonist and antagonist. The dramatic struggle may be between a weak nature and a strong; between virtue and vice; between man and his environment, man and society, man and fate. The idea of struggle is fundamental, and, moreover, each opposing element, the play and the counterplay, must be represented by some single exponent: it is Brutus *vs.* Cæsar; Macbeth *vs.* Macduff; Othello *vs.* Iago; Tito *vs.* Romola.

In the case of *Esther*, Mordecai represents the play, and Haman the counterplay. The other characters serve to supplement the main action of the conflict between these two principal actors. The course of the dramatic struggle becomes apparent if we contrast the relative positions of the two conflicting forces at the beginning and at the close of the action. At the outset, we have Mordecai, the son of Jair, a Jew of the Captivity, without status and without influence, even passed over without reward after having saved the life of the King himself. And on the other hand stands Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, promoted by the King above all the princes and revered by all that sat in the King's gate, save by Mordecai the Jew. Then comes the conflict, and, at the end, the complete reversal of the initial status: Haman and his ten sons hanged upon the very gallows that he had prepared for his enemy; and Mordecai great in the King's house, honored throughout

his little book *How to Write*; but the analysis following differs from his study in several respects.

the royal provinces. Thus we have the triumph of the play and the overthrow of the counterplay.

The course of this same narrative well illustrates also the meaning of two other terms, *rise* and *fall*, used to indicate the two main divisions of the dramatic action. The ultimate reversal of conditions which has been pointed out as characterizing the *Esther* plot is not a sudden phenomenon, but a gradual process. The fortunes of Haman ascend by degrees to constantly higher planes; the counter-efforts of Mordecai indicate a losing struggle. A moment, however, is finally reached when the success of Haman attains its culmination, and, for an instant, play and counterplay stand in equilibrium. Then the decline begins. From that point success falls away from Haman; his good fortune deserts him; he yields step by step before the advance of Mordecai, and the action falls more and more rapidly to the close. This successive rising and falling action is conventionally represented by the appended diagram, figure 4.

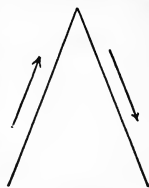


FIG. 4

A second characteristic typical of the dramatic method of plot-ordering is found in the logical nature of the bond that unites the various episodes. It is not enough that mere chance shall bring about the triumph of the play or of the counterplay; each episode must constitute an *event* in the sense already developed on page 205. In the *Esther* plot, for example, while Jehovah's name and direct interference in the action are not distinctly specified as the motive power, yet God's care for the Promised Seed is the consistent mainspring of the narrative. The story itself is a sort of national drama, explaining the institution of the Feast of Purim, and Mor-

decai's triumph over his enemy comes in no way through a mere fortuitous combination of circumstances; rather it results from a direct chain of causation; it emanates from an intelligent will; it marks the accomplishment of a definite purpose.

These two features, then, may be called the fundamentals of the dramatic structure: (a) the rise and fall of play and counterplay, or the dramatic conflict; and (b) the serial nature of the episodes. Subordinate to them are further essential characteristics. In the course of the rising and falling action there are certain well-defined "moments," or stages, that mark the progress of the action along its course. Of these the first is what is sometimes termed the *exposition*, or the anticipatory action. This is the preliminary stage found at the threshold of every form of plot movement. The reader must know his surroundings, he must meet those whose fortunes he is to follow. The author must familiarize him with all necessary details, and yet give him no hint of what is to come, lest the rhetorical force of the *dénouement* be destroyed. Setting and, it may be, preliminary characterization will play important rôles. The bleeding sergeant will acquaint the audience with the news from the front; Ross will announce the victory of Duncan, the fate of Cawdor, and the coming honors of Macbeth. Flavius and Marullus, the tribunes, will expound conditions prevalent at Rome, — the ambition of Cæsar, the uneasiness of the republicans, the degeneration of the commons. If the exposition be well done, the reader will be prepared to follow intelligently the thread of the rising action when it shall definitely begin its upward movement.

In *Esther* the exposition consists of five well-defined episodes that serve this purpose of introduction: (1) The



royal feast given by King Ahasuerus in Shushan, followed by Queen Vashti's refusal to obey the King's command, and her banishment; (2) the preparations for the appointment of her successor, including the introduction of Mordecai and Esther; (3) Esther's year of preparation in the house of Hegai, followed by her increasing favor with the King, and her coronation; (4) the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh, and Mordecai's service in saving the King's life; (5) the introduction of Haman, already high in the royal favor. It will be observed that all these steps are no more than introductory. The various plot threads are merely indicated; they as yet show no complication. In fact, the two main strands of what we recognize later as the play and the counter-play betray no sign of convergence. The plot action has not begun, but the reader, after this preliminary exposition, is in a position to follow understandingly the complications that may arise out of the conditions thus placed before him. In its relation to the complete plot to be



FIG. 5

evolved, the situation at this point in the narrative may be represented as in figure 5, the horizontal, continuous line indicating the exposition preliminary to the upward movement of the rising action.

When the exposition is complete, there succeeds an episode that brings to sudden convergence the threads of play and counterplay, disturbs the expository conditions, and precipitates the dramatic conflict. This episode constitutes what is known as the *moment of exciting force*. The witches inspire in the heart of Macbeth the ambition to seize the throne of Scotland. Cassius

turns the mind of Brutus definitely in the direction of conflict with Cæsar and Cæsarism. In *Esther* the play and counterplay are suddenly thrown into antagonistic relations by Mordecai's refusal to reverence Haman. The conflict once set into action, the progress of the rising movement begins. The status may be represented as in figure 6, the star indicating the initial action under discussion.

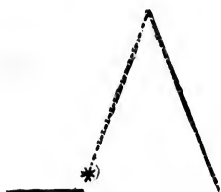


FIG. 6

From the moment of exciting force up to the turning-point of the narrative extends the main course of the rising action, sometimes technically known as the *heightening*. The hero now shows a steady increase in power, a constant growth toward the attainment of his goal. The collision between the play and the counterplay becomes increasingly violent. If the narrative be principally one of action, the threads become increasingly complicated; if of character, the personality of the hero is more clearly expounded, and is brought into increasing conflict with external forces. This phase is a period of vigorous action, rapid movement, and definite progress toward the climax. All this is well exemplified in the course of the Old Testament narrative under consideration. The heightening passes through five stages, or scenes, with their respective secondary episodes: (1) Haman, filled with wrath against Mordecai, plots vengeance in the wholesale slaughter of the Jews, who, through his influence with Ahasuerus, are delivered over to him; the edict goes forth; the Jews fill the land with lamentation; Haman's star is in the ascendant. (2) Mordecai now comes forward and places upon Esther the responsibility of saving her people; unmindful of the

danger, she consents, with the patriotic exclamation, "If I perish, I perish!" (3) Then follow her self-sought audience with the King, her favorable reception, her invitation to the King and Haman, the banquet of wine, and her petition. (4) From this scene we pass to Haman's house and see him in all his boastful pride; never have his fortunes been so prosperous; his position with the King is assured, and with the Queen as well he is apparently a favorite; he confidently orders the erection of a gallows for the execution of his enemy. (5) Then ensues a brief episode, fraught with significance to play and counterplay: the King is reminded of Mordecai's services at the time of Bigthan and Teresh's conspiracy, and discovers that the faithful Jew has never been rewarded for his loyalty. Up to this point of the narrative the hero of the rising action has steadily advanced in fortune, and now stands at the apex of his prosperity, — the attainment of supreme social and political favor. Mordecai, on the other hand, has met with consistent adversity. But it is clear, through all, that Haman's fortunes contain the possibilities of downfall and that Mordecai's apparently hopeless case contains equally great possibilities of betterment. In other words, the rise has in it the seeds of complete reversal of conditions. The plot up to this point would be represented as in figure 7.

It is clear that the point now reached is critical: a complete change in the course of fortune



FIG. 7

is at hand. The onward progress of one set of conditions is on the verge of being checked, and the current is about to set in the new direction. At this place,

which marks the culmination of the rising action, stands the crisis known as the *climax*. It is generally a moment not only of reversal but of great tension as well. In the drama it usually occurs in the third act, — at any rate, approximately near the middle of the play. The climactic scene may be elaborate and picturesque in setting, as in the banquet scene of *Macbeth* or the senate scene of *Julius Cæsar*, or it may be lacking in external elaboration, as in *Esther*; but tense and critical it should be, in order to accomplish the fullness of its effect. A distinction at this point is sometimes drawn between the actual climax and what is known as the *tragic moment*; that is, between the instant when the reversal actually begins and the instant when some critical incident renders such reversal inevitable. But, although this distinction may frequently be drawn without difficulty, yet usually the two merge into one.

An illustration of climax is found at the moment when, in answer to the King's summons, Haman stands before the throne and, confident of its application to himself, makes answer to the inquiry as to what shall be done to the man whom the King delights to honor. "Then the King said to Haman . . . 'Do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the King's gate: let nothing fail of all

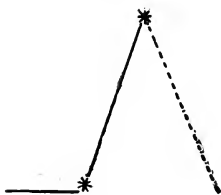


FIG. 8

that thou hast spoken.'" With these words and with Haman's complete discomfiture the current of the narrative turns and plunges downward. The effectiveness of the scene is tremendous. The crushing effect of the King's command is intensified by the total unexpectedness

with which it falls on Haman's ears. The demolition

of his air castles and the bitterness of his humiliation are complete. It is the "psychologic moment" of the entire plot. The diagram shows the culmination of the action.

After this culmination of the plot structure there remains but the downward course of the action to its close, the *fall*, containing the resolution of the thread complications. The powers that have been in the ascendant now decline before the counter-action, which gains in vigor as it advances. The moment of greatest intensity having passed, there is little further complication, and, now that the ultimate issue of the plot is apparent, the problem of sustaining interest presents peculiar difficulty. To offset this difficulty and to sustain the interest, various devices are utilized, — among them, striking scenes marked by elaborate setting and great emotional vigor. Frequently at this stage the writer introduces what is known as the *moment of final suspense*, a crisis at which, for a brief period, the downward course of the action seems on the verge of being arrested and the impending crisis averted. Drama itself frequently offers example of this moment: the final clause in the witches' threefold prophecy seems for an instant to offer a ray of hope to Macbeth, about whom disasters are gathering fast and thick; Brutus for a moment hesitates at the thought of suicide, reasoning that it betrays cowardice thus to "prevent the time of life" for fear of ills to come. But the check is never quite adequate: Macduff proves that the prophecy has no application in his case; Brutus ultimately rushes upon the sword held by Strato. In prose narrative the moment of final suspense is frequently lacking, but, in order to meet the difficulty of sustaining the interest after the point of culmination has been reached, the fall is made very brief

in duration, so that the climax, instead of occupying a medial position, is advanced well on toward the conclusion.

The falling action of *Esther* is divided as follows: The first scene presents Haman's bitterness and prostration of spirit, following his humiliating obedience to the King's command regarding Mordecai. The inevitableness of Haman's undoing, too, is emphasized by the prophetic warning of Zeresh, that if his enemy be of the Jewish people her husband will in vain seek to prevail. Then follows the great scene of the banquet given by the Queen to the King and to Haman, a scene capable of almost unlimited elaboration. The note pervading this episode, however, is diametrically different from that of similar preceding scenes in the story as far as it affects the principal personage concerned. Haman, to be sure, is the honored guest, he has attained the summit of his ambition, yet all his honors and his success are little better than ashes, — all the warmth and the glow have departed from them. The sense of impending disaster is omnipresent; the atmosphere of falling action is unmistakable. The banquet scene contains in reality three constituent narrative episodes marking this climactic approach to disaster: Esther's indictment of Haman as the persecutor of her people, and the King's anger; Haman's despairing appeal to the Queen for mercy; and last, the edict for Haman's execution. The second of these episodes is noteworthy as suggesting, in a way, the moment of final suspense. If Haman is to secure any consideration at all, it must be through the favor of the Queen, whose family and race he has cruelly wronged. Very properly, then, does he throw himself upon Esther's mercy. But she, possessing many of the characteristics that distinguished Jael and

Deborah, stands in a peculiarly responsible position: she is acting for her people, not as an individual. And, to emphasize the inevitableness of Haman's fate, the King misinterprets his action, and the edict of death is immediate. If, then, the scene between Haman and the Queen be viewed as a moment of final suspense, it certainly possesses one of the prime essentials of that moment, in that immediately after this promise of a possible check, the downward plunge of the action is increasingly steep and rapid. A diagram of the story up to the point of Haman's death warrant would appear as in figure 9, the angle in the fall representing the moment of suspense just preliminary to the final and precipitate stage.



FIG. 9

There remains only the concluding phase of the dramatic plot, the culmination, or completion, of the fall, known technically as the *catastrophe*. In the type of plot structure under discussion, catastrophe differs radically from climax, although in other forms the two may coalesce, as will be set forth later. Catastrophe has about it the character of finality, of termination. Consequently if the catastrophe be well conceived the coherence of the plot structure will be evident. At this point all the lines of action converge in that they indicate it as the inevitable issue. It calms the conflicting forces that have been disturbed since the beginning of the dramatic struggle.

The word "catastrophe" has by association come to connote to the average reader the idea of death or disaster. But this signification is not essential. It implies no

reflection on the charms of the heroine nor a pessimistic attitude toward marriage to say that the winning of her hand may form the catastrophe of a dramatic plot. Death is catastrophic when it is the logical and inevitable termination of the plot series. Tito's death is catastrophic in *Romola*, but only as attendant upon his moral death which has already occurred. His tragic end below the Bridge of Santa Trinita, with Baldassarre's fingers at his white throat, is a fitting culmination to the general moral disintegration that has steadily progressed since Tito first yielded to the temptations of self-interest.



FIG. 10

And so it is with the death of Haman. In view of the setting of the story in the Oriental court of Ahasuerus and amid Eastern customs of prompt punishment for offenders against the royal power, the death of Haman is the inevitable and fitting issue of the

events, that constitute the narrative. The complete story, then, would be indicated in figure 10.

It is to be noted that the dramatic effectiveness of narratives built on this plan is increased if the finality of the catastrophe be not weakened by an appended exposition setting forth the ultimate disposal of all characters accessory to the action. Some degree of emotional tension at the very end is forceful, on the rhetorical principle of emphasis. The sense of absolute coherence is maintained and the effect of a strong conclusion is not lost. The conventional endings of the type familiar to readers of *The Marble Faun* or of *A Tale of Two Cities* do not always leave the sense of dramatic culmination.

And how does this apply to the *Esther* narrative, in



which the catastrophe is followed by a conclusion half as long as all that has preceded? The reader must not forget that this chronicle is primarily an expository narrative, setting forth the institution of a great national festival, the Feast of Purim. Within this larger field stands the dramatic unit, the narrative of Mordecai and Haman, and this latter story we may view as concluding with the catastrophe already indicated. The fitting conclusion to the dramatic plot would be found in the words: "Then the King said, 'Hang him thereon.' So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the King's wrath pacified."

The anti-climactic effects of supplementing the catastrophic conclusion by the addition of matter extraneous to the plot is admirably illustrated in this very case of *Esther*. Let one overlook the distinction between the Haman-Mordecai narrative and the broader chronicle within which it is embraced, let him read it in its entirety as a single narrative, and the falling off of emotional interest after the words "Then was the King's wrath pacified" is unmistakable. The reader is conscious of a distinct mental effort as he continues with the extended details regarding the 'post and rommage' through the King's domains, the stand made by the Jews before their enemies, and the establishment of the day of national thanksgiving. So in general: the catastrophe should stand very near the actual conclusion, if not at that very point.

This ordering of plot structure after the dramatic plan is best suited to extended narratives that proceed after a leisurely fashion on toward their conclusion. The short-story, limited by its very nature to rapidity of action and to a restricted selection of details, seldom presents a suitable field for the systematic succession of the

dramatic method from preliminary exposition through climax to catastrophe. The novel of character, on the other hand, presents the very best material, for here the writer has all the space necessary to the elaboration of personality through circumstance and action. Probably *Silas Marner* offers the example most familiar to students. In this novel the climax, the turning-point in Marner's career, with the attendant change of external relations consequent thereon, occupies almost the middle of the narrative, chapter XII, the story from that point falling off to the catastrophe.

A more recent and a very perfect example of the dramatic method is to be found in Maurice Hewlett's *Richard Yea-and-Nay*. This is a story of strenuous action and of evolution in personality as well. The novel is constructed so strictly along the lines of rising and falling action, the various "moments" being clearly indicated, that it is possible to divide it into acts and scenes as in the actual drama. Below follows the construction of the first "act" and the general scheme of what is included within it:—

#### RICHARD YEA-AND-NAY

##### Act I. EXPOSITION AND EXCITING FORCE (chaps. I-V).

###### Scene I. *The Dark Tower.*

- a. On the plain.
- b. Within the castle.
- c. In the fields.
- d. In the chapel.
  - (a) The Mass.
  - (b) Richard's departure.
  - (c) Jehane and Milo.

###### Scene II. *At Saint Pol-la-Marche.*

- a. Jehane, Eudo, and Eustace.
- b. Gilles' arrival.

###### Scene III. *At Louviers.*

- a. Richard and his company at Evreux.
- b. The Court of Henry.

- (a) Richard meets Henry and consents.
- (b) Lady Alois.
- (c) Richard demands the truth of John.
- (d) The Court at Paris (digression).
- (e) Richard's audience with Alois.
- (f) Richard and Henry.
- (g) Gaston is despatched to Gisors.

Scene IV. *At Saint Pol-la-Marche.*

- a. Gaston's arrival.
- b. Gilles and Jehane.
- c. Richard's arrival and renunciation.

Scene V. *At Autofort.*

- a. Arrival of Gaston and Richard.
- b. THE TENZON WITH BERTRAND.  
(*Moment of Exciting Force*).
- c. Richard's resolution and departure.

Act II would embrace chapters VI–XVII, in six scenes, including the rising action in general. Act III, including the first five chapters of the second book, constitutes the dramatic climax of the story, which occurs actually toward the close of the fourth and last scene. Act IV, which marks, in a general way, the dramatic fall in three scenes, extends through the thirteenth chapter of book II. The closing act of five scenes is catastrophic in character; it includes a well-marked moment of final suspense as well as the final catastrophe itself and a concluding post-dramatic episode.

(c) *Method of Story*

The dramatic type of plot structure suggests the course of a rocket, which reaches the height of its flight and is already well advanced on its return before it bursts. But there are other pyrotechnic devices the climax of whose flight is simultaneous with the final display. And similarly the writer of narrative often secures his effect by a modification of the dramatic method so marked as to constitute practically a new

order of plot structure. This we have termed the "method of story." In such cases the narrator seeks to secure the highest emotional tension. The element of suspense plays a more important part, in order that the culmination — in this case, the union of climax and catastrophe — may constitute the most important stage in the action. In the dramatic structure the ultimate issue of the *dénouement* is more or less clearly indicated early in the narrative. The actual details of the catastrophe may not be accurately outlined, but their trend is clear enough. The climax once passed, it does not require any unusual degree of penetration to forecast that Macbeth's ambition will prove fatal, that Eppie will change the course of Silas's life, that Haman will ultimately give way before Mordecai. The method of story, on the other hand, is especially suited to those narratives in which mystery furnishes the motive of action. Certainly narratives of this order would defeat their very end were the culmination betrayed, or even indicated, midway in the plot. As a consequence, the main concern of the writer is to hold the issue back while he elaborates all the details that may render the culmination inevitable when it finally shall occur. As an example of this we may again cite Maupassant's *The Necklace*. Every detail of this narrative is so ordered as to insure the dramatic and catastrophic effect of the closing words: "Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste. It was worth five hundred francs at most." Aldrich's *Marjorie Daw* is a perfect instance of the method of story, closing, as it does, with a wholly unexpected crisis; it dazes the reader with a blow of surprise and — leaves him.

The extent to which this type of structure is a modification of dramatic plot will be apparent from figure 11.

We have the preliminary exposition (*a*), the exciting force (*b*), the rise (*c*), and the climax-catastrophe (*d*); but of a return through falling action there is no sign.

Generally, however, the method of story is less abrupt than in the type exemplified by *The Necklace* or *Marjorie Daw*. The climax-catastrophe is often rounded out, as it were, by a brief but well-defined conclusion. Hardy's *The Three Strangers* is a case in point. The climax is attained as soon as the reader is definitely acquainted with the identity of the three wanderers who successively make their appearance at Shepherd Fennel's house on the night of the storm. But after that point has been reached the author continues his narrative to the extent of telling us: —

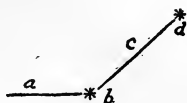


FIG. 11

The bass-voiced man of the chimney-corner was never recaptured. Some said that he went across the sea, others that he did not, but buried himself in the depths of a populous city. At any rate, the gentleman in cinder-gray never did his morning's work at Casterbridge, nor met anywhere at all, for business purposes, the genial comrade with whom he had passed an hour of relaxation in the lonely house on the coomb.

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hardy's *Wessex Tales*. Published by Harper and Brothers.

The diagram of a story of this character is shown in figure 12: *a'* representing the antithesis of *a*, a sort of post-exposition, so to speak.



FIG. 12

Suspense, not only sustained but cumulative, adds greatly to the movement and the effectiveness of plot structure thus ordered. Every episode will increase the complication of the various threads of action, and, while still keeping the culmination in check, will steadily make it increasingly inevitable, so to speak. In prospect the issue will not be conjectured; in retrospect every detail will be recognized as having been a link in one unbroken chain of causation.

*The Black Poodle*, by F. Anstey, is an admirable example of this type of structure, illustrating the various analogies to the dramatic method, as well as the various points of divergence. For purposes of analysis we may consider the action as showing six distinct stages: (1) preliminary exposition; (2) introductory action; (3) episode of exciting force; (4) rising action of complication; (5) climax-catastrophe; and (6) conclusion. The progress of these various stages will be clear from the following tabulation of action.

#### THE BLACK POODLE

##### 1. PRELIMINARY EXPOSITION.

- a. Motive of the story.
- b. Setting: Wistaria Villa.
- c. *Dramatis personæ*: the Weatherheads.
- d. Antecedent action.

##### 2. INTRODUCTORY ACTION.

- a. At Shuturgarden.  
Introduction of Bingo.

Incipient love for Lilian.

Bingo's hostility.

b. At Wistaria Villa.

Feline amenities.

3. MOMENT OF EXCITING FORCE.

Bingo's death.

4. RISING ACTION OF COMPLICATION.

Complication 1. In the garden at Wistaria Villa.

With the Colonel.

Bingo's burial.

Visions.

Complication 2. At Shuturgarden: one evening later.

Family desolation.

Weatherhead's encouragement.

Lilian's incredulity.

Complication 3. At Shuturgarden: Sunday evening.

The declaration.

Lilian's condition.

Weatherhead's resolution.

Complication 4.

a. At Blagg's.

The discovery and the purchase.

b. At Wistaria Villa.

The restoration.

The dinner.

Bingo's accomplishments.

Complication 5. At Wistaria Villa.

The strolling Frenchman.

"Azor"!

Compounding a felony.

The collar.

5. CLIMAX.

Revelation and desperation.

6. CONCLUSION.

The tablet.

The course of the story might be diagrammatically presented as in figure 13.

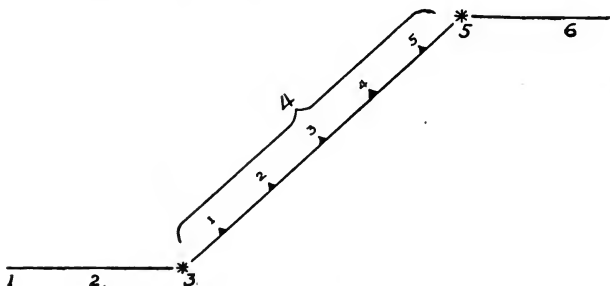


FIG. 13

### Emphasis

Although emphasis in plot structure has already of necessity been discussed to some extent in connection with coherence and climax, — yet there are some considerations that belong peculiarly to emphasis *per se*, and should receive attention before we dismiss the organization of plot material. It is to be observed at the outset that the whole matter of emphasis in the arrangement of plot elements is in the main nothing more than securing increased vividness. Narrative of fact, except for picturesqueness and effectiveness of characterization, addresses itself primarily to the understanding and is therefore not likely to take liberties in the ordering of facts for the sake of more vigorous appeal. Of course, to some extent, emphatic phrasing contributes to clearness, and to this extent is intellectual in its purpose, but in the great number of cases emphasis is synonymous with emotional tension and its aim is sustained interest. It is in narrative that appeals to the imagina-



tion, then, in the novel and in the short-story, that we shall find best illustration of ordering details, of "massing," for the sake of greater emotional effect.

Almost all works on rhetoric discuss the element of emphasis under the following heads:—

- a. Position of emphatic elements; massing.
- b. Proportion.
- c. Definiteness.

Each of them may be considered briefly in its relation to plot structure.

(a) *Massing*

We are taught that in the sentence and in the paragraph the position of greatest effectiveness is at the beginning and the end; that to imbed the central theme in a welter of modifiers and commentary elaboration is to destroy the forcefulness of the thought. The following sentence from Macaulay's essay on Milton illustrates the principle:—

We disapprove, we repeat, of the execution of Charles; not because the constitution exempts the King from responsibility, for we know that all such maxims, however excellent, have their exceptions; nor because we feel any peculiar interest in his character, for we think that his sentence describes him with perfect justice as "a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer, and a public enemy"; but because we are convinced that the measure was most injurious to the cause of freedom.

The cardinal thought of this long period resides in the final clause. Transpose this clause to any other position in the sentence: the vigor of the statement is lost and the assertion becomes painfully ineffectual.

The cumulative effect of judicious massing in the paragraph is seen in the following passage from the

same essay. The paragraph, as they say of the track athlete, "ends strong." It is vigorous and robust.

Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush, the days of servitude without loyalty and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. The King cringed to his rival that he might trample on his people, sank into a viceroy of France, and pocketed, with complacent infamy, her degrading insults, and her more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots, and the jests of buffoons, regulated the policy of the State. The Government had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the Anathema Maranatha of every fawning dean. In every high place, worship was paid to Charles and James, Belial and Moloch; and England propitiated those obscene and cruel idols with the blood of her best and bravest children. Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace, till the race accursed of God and man was a second time driven forth, to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a by-word and a shaking of the head to the nations.

This same principle of initial and terminal massing for the sake of increased vigor holds equally true in the larger units of narrative writing. We have already noted how disappointing and, in a sense, how anti-climactic are the narratives that, after an effective massing of plot details, weakly trail off into a sort of literary post-script. Indeed were it not for the catastrophe-culmination of the dramatic method, the medial climax would result in a most ineffectual type of plot structure. The final suspense and culmination save the day.

As between the initial and the terminal position, the terminal offers the better opportunity for effective ordering. In almost any piece of narration an expository purpose is uppermost at the outset; the interest in the

course of recorded events is not yet aroused. Once stirred, however, it must go on increasingly. Hence the necessity of culmination. The concluding sentences of the forceful narratives already cited on page 220 afford illustration of this terminal massing.

On the other hand, there are occasions when initial ordering of details serves the purpose of vigor. Initial massing is familiar in those narratives that by dramatic introduction seek to capture the attention of the reader at the very beginning by confronting him at once with a crisis in action or with a bit of dramatic setting. Examples of the device appear in Balzac's *A Passion in the Desert* or in Morrison's *On the Stairs*.

These stories illustrate two distinct results secured by initial massing. On the one hand, as in *A Passion in the Desert*, initial presentation of effective material may serve to overcome the mental inertia that almost always weighs upon the reader at the beginning of a story, — unless he be spurred on by intellectual curiosity, as in the case of the scientist. Every one is familiar with the burden of getting fairly under way that attends the opening of an extended narrative. The opening chapter of *Bleak House*, for example, or of *Diana of the Crossways*, is so long in hoisting the narrative anchor that many a reader disembarks without delay and seeks passage elsewhere. Not so, however, with the type of story typified in the Balzac narrative:—

“It makes me shudder,” she exclaimed as she came out of Monsieur Martin's menagerie. She had been watching that daring showman as he “worked” with his hyena — to use the words of the handbills.

The love of adventure, the sense of peril, is at once piqued, and sufficient impetus is secured without delay

to carry the reader over the expository preface necessary for an understanding of what is to follow.

On the other hand, the writer may seek to establish the *tone* of the narrative, to arouse in the reader an initial frame of mind proper for appreciating the underlying spirit of the composition. This is true, for example, in Morrison's story:—

The house had been "genteel." When trade was prospering in the East End, and the ship-fitter or block-maker thought it no shame to live in the parish where his workshop lay, such a master had lived here. Now, it was a tall, solid, well-bricked, ugly house, grimy and paintless in the joinery, cracked and patched in the windows: where the front door stood open all day long; and the womankind sat on the steps, talking of sickness and death and the cost of things; and treacherous holes lurked in the carpet of road-soil on the stairs and in the passage. For when eight families live in a house, nobody buys a door-mat, and the street was one of those streets that are always muddy. It smelt, too, of many things, none of them pleasant (one was fried fish); but for all that it was not a slum.<sup>1</sup>

This bit of distinctive setting, of dramatic description, is essential for appreciation of what follows, and the opening has an effectiveness that is clearly evident and catches the attention at the very threshold. A wonderful instance of the same thing is familiar to all readers of Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, where the sense of utter desolation characteristic of the heath marks the opening of the narrative,—a scene pictured with such masterly power that it has become famous.

A further device of position in the interests of increased emphasis is illustrated in the balanced type of structure, of which Macaulay is so fond. The following from the essay on John Hampden furnishes an example.

<sup>1</sup> From *Tales of Mean Streets*. Copyright, 1895, by Roberts Brothers.

Those who had pulled down the crucifix could not long continue to persecute for the surplice. It required no great sagacity to perceive the inconsistency and dishonesty of men who, dissenting from almost all Christendom, would suffer none to dissent from themselves, who demanded freedom of conscience, yet refused to grant it, who execrated persecution, yet persecuted, who urged reason against the authority of one opponent, and authority against the reasons of another. Bonner acted at least in accordance with his own principles. Cranmer could vindicate himself from the charge of being a heretic only by arguments which made him out to be a murderer. ●

The effectiveness of this military precision in massing clauses is unquestionable — if it be not carried to the extreme. But the balanced structure serves merely the purpose of occasional literary dress-parade; it is not a natural and spontaneous method of expression. The reader speedily becomes conscious of the deliberate effort at effective grouping and loses interest in the thought itself. Betrayal of insincerity on the writer's part is always fatal to sustained vigor.

The principle of the balanced structure is illustrated in extended narrative writing in two distinct ways: (a) by the iteration of a specified passage or scene; and (b) by the succession of effectively massed episodes. Dickens's *A Child's Dream of a Star* offers an instance of the first. The successive stages of the action are grouped about the refrain six times repeated, "And the star was shining," so that the whole composition presents something of the elaborately ordered scheme represented in balanced sentences. The same type of parallel structure may be found in even more extended compositions. Bulwer Lytton's long novel *The Last of the Barons* is an example. The appearance at intervals of the timbrel girls with their recurring refrain, —

"But death to the dove  
Is the falcon's love!  
Oh, sharp is the kiss of the falcon's beak!"

offers a balancing of details for added effect. Sometimes an author will revert to a particular scene, introducing the characters in the same setting again and again, seeking by the process of association to gain emotional power. Ellen Glasgow in *The Romance of a Plain Man* has utilized as a setting for successive episodes the old garden in which Sally and Ben Starr first met in early days, each recurring scene deriving much of its value from the memories associated with the same background. But even when used on so large a canvas as a complete novel, this device of iteration is still subject to the peril that threatens the simple balanced sentence: if the realization of artificiality prevails over the forcefulness arising from orderly arrangement, all emotional value is lost.

The second variation of the balanced structure, the succession of similarly massed episodes, is illustrated in *Richard Yea-and-Nay*. In this case the balance appears in that even the various episodes, as well as the work as a whole, are, in general, constructed successively on the dramatic plan. Many of them are ordered with rise, climax, and fall of their own. The general plot ordering follows the subjoined diagram: —

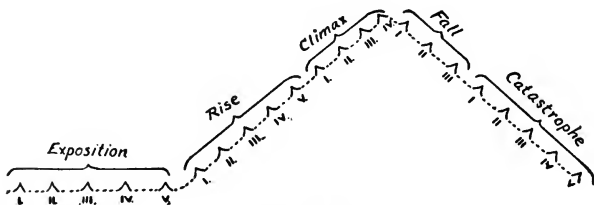


FIG. 14

The exposition, it will be seen, consists of five episodes, each one of which is in some degree dramatic in its own structure. The rise, in turn, is made up of six similarly constructed episodes; and so on. It is not to be inferred that the story is so perfectly and mechanically organized as the formal diagram might seem to indicate; at the same time, the approximation is sufficiently remarkable. In general, the narrative shows distinct similarity in the coördinated elements, or episodes, — and this is the fundamental principle of the balanced structure.

Another phase of this systematic and balanced ordering of plot elements may be found in those narratives whose episodes successively terminate in moments of suspense, thus causing the story to progress by a series of climax-culminations, or dramatic situations, as in a play, thus:—

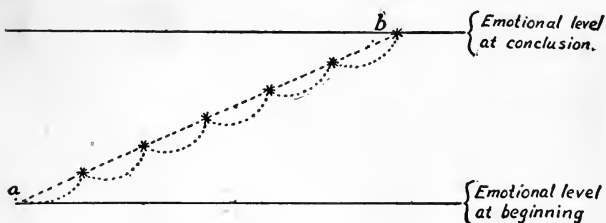


FIG. 15

The main line of the plot action, indicated by the dotted line *ab*, steadily rises, each episode taking up the thread from a point of increased emotional tension, at which it was left by the culmination of the episode preceding. In narratives of this order, the principle of balance is evident by the climax of suspense that marks the closing words of each episode. Hardy's gruesome short-story

*The Withered Arm* is fairly representative of this terminal balance in successive episodes, as will be apparent if one examines the concluding paragraph of each plot division. There is about these concluding periods a peculiar air of suspense, of situation, — especially marked in I, III, V, VI, VII, and VIII, — that almost leads the reader to expect the conventional stage-direction "*Curtain.*"

The ordering of the narrative elements so as to produce contrast is a further means of attaining emotional vigor. As the contrasting lights and shadows of a Rembrandt are effective, so in narrative the juxtaposition of unlike scenes promotes forcefulness. A typical instance may be found in Macaulay's essay on Sir William Temple, where he ranges the character of Halifax against that of Shaftesbury: —

His (Halifax's) mind was much less turned to particular observations, and much more to general speculations, than that of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury knew the King, the Council, the Parliament, the City, better than Halifax; but Halifax would have written a far better treatise on political science than Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury shone more in consultation and Halifax in controversy: Shaftesbury was more fertile in expedients, and Halifax in arguments. . . . He brought forward with wonderful readiness and copiousness, arguments, replies to those arguments, rejoinders to those replies, general maxims of policy, and analogous cases from history. But Shaftesbury was the man for a prompt decision. Of the parliamentary eloquence of these celebrated rivals, we can judge only by report; and so judging, we should be inclined to think that, though Shaftesbury was a distinguished speaker, the superiority belonged to Halifax. . . . The power of Shaftesbury over large masses was unrivalled. Halifax was disqualified by his whole character, moral and intellectual, for the part of a demagogue. It was in small circles, and,



above all, in the House of Lords, that his ascendancy was felt.

In narrative writing this method of ordering is effective in a variety of ways: in setting, in character, in action, contrast may serve the ends of forcefulness. In *Tess* the three stages of the heroine's life are rendered all the more effective from their projection against the wholly unlike backgrounds of Blackmore Vale, the valley of the From, and Flintcombe-Ash. In Prescott's *Conquest of Peru* the character of the pedantic martinet Blasco Nuñez is made more forceful by being brought into adversative correlation with that of the keen and practical Pedro de la Gasca. And similarly, details of action by the same method of antithesis receive added dramatic effectiveness. No reader of *Vanity Fair* can fail to realize the emotional effectiveness of the sudden contrast that distinguishes the transition from chapter XXII to chapter XXIII. On the one hand is the scene of carnage and confusion closing with the famous paragraph, —

No more firing was heard at Brussels — the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart;

and on the other, the quiet of Brighton, where Miss Crawley was passing her uneventful days, very little moved by the great events that attended the making and unmaking of empires.

### (b) *Proportion*

One of the most effective means of holding interest, — that is, of securing rhetorical emphasis, — is to give each essential element in the narrative its proportionate

amount of space; or, to state it negatively, to give it no more elaboration than it deserves. This means that the writer shall have a clear idea of his controlling thought before he can duly enforce it. As the definition of narration makes evident, the main purpose of narrative writing is the setting in order, the developing, *of the event*. It is clear, then, that setting and characterization must receive relatively less elaboration than action. But this is only a general statement of the principle of proportion. In the exposition of the action many questions arise as to relative values: episodes of one order and another; details of rise and fall, of climax and catastrophe. The principle of proportion plays its part in the relative ordering of each of these. The precise adjustment, for example, of the amount of description or characterization necessary for preliminary exposition in a dramatic plot is a very nice matter, for the moment that the non-narrative matter begins to encroach upon the main business of the plot structure, proportion is lost and interest suffers. Professor Baldwin in his *Composition, Oral and Written*<sup>1</sup> has well illustrated this matter by Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. He shows that the core idea of the whole composition is the sentence: *The best honor that we can pay these dead soldiers is to preserve the Union for which they died*. In other words, the speech looks principally to the future: references to the present and past are merely accessory. A single sentence, the first, concerns the past; the next three sentences deal with the present, indeed, but with a distinctly prospective purpose; and all that remains, consisting of more than half the address, is an appeal for devotion to the Union in the years to come. In this way, by due proportioning of the space, the main idea is emphasized.

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 20-22.

This same principle controls the writer of extended narrative. If he chronicle facts of history, he must so compress his work, by the exclusion of superfluous detail and by accurate judgment as to relative values, that the completed work shall adequately bring out the central theme and give unity and emphasis to the finished result. It is in this respect, according to J. F. Rhodes in an article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in February, 1900, that Thucydides and Tacitus are superior to the historians of our own time: they have better digested their material, and, therefore, are less prone to give disproportionate space to details of relatively little importance. The writer says: —

One reason why Macaulay is so prolix is because he could not resist the temptation to treat events which had a picturesque side and which were suited to his literary style; so that, as John Morley says, "in many portions of his too elaborated history of William III. he describes a large number of events about which, I think, no sensible man can in the least care either how they happened, or indeed whether they happened at all or not." If I am right in my supposition that Thucydides and Tacitus had a mass of materials, they showed reserve and discretion in throwing a large part of them away, as not being necessary or important to the posterity for which they were writing. This could only be the result of a careful comparison of their materials, and of long meditation on their relative value. I suspect that they cared little whether a set daily task was accomplished or not; for if you propose to write only one large volume or four moderate-sized volumes in a lifetime, art is not too long nor is life too short.

And as with history so with the narrative of fiction: the central theme, with especial view to its culmination, must never be lost. Whether it be the solution of a mystery, as in *The Gold Bug*; the crisis of a personal ex-

perience, as in *Flute and Violin*; increasing tension leading to sudden solution, as in *Marjorie Daw*; a character study, like *Richard Feverel*;—whatever be the theme, subsidiary matter must be treated as subsidiary matter, for only as it contributes to the main theme and itself remains subordinated to that theme, will it be effective and contribute to ultimate interest.

Hardy's *The Three Strangers* affords example of well-sustained proportion in plot structure. The theme about which the action turns is primarily the identity of the first stranger, and, in less degree, that of the other two. The development of the plot idea is furthered, not by action alone, but by setting, by characterization, and by direct exposition. The background of Wessex rusticity and the tempestuous night, Mrs. Fennel's anxiety for her supply of mead, the booming of the gun from the jail at Casterbridge:—these and other details tend to heighten the mystery of the three travelers who seek shelter at the shepherd's cottage. Dialogue affords the main avenue of plot action, and here the importance of the three strangers is made evident. Nearly one third of this portion of the story is devoted to the words of the principal actors, mainly to those of the first and second strangers. Space is given to them in proportion to their importance in the action; the paragraphs in which they enter directly and indirectly constitute by far the major part of the entire composition. Of digression and elaboration of non-contributive detail there is practically little. By this due attention to proportion unity is secured and the interest which is concentrated on the principal personages increases the emphasis of the narrative.

(c) *Definiteness*

In closing the consideration of the various characteristics that contribute to interest, a word should be added with reference to the third element mentioned on page 225: definiteness, or clearness. Clearness in this connection, however, does not signify mere lucidity of phraseology as seen in the careful ordering of clauses, phrases, and single words. In plot structure, clearness has reference rather to the ordering of the plot elements, — whether they appear in connection with setting, characterization, or action, — in such manner that they shall leave no doubt as to the trend of the various plot threads, the precise nature of the complication, the definite course of events leading to the culmination. Clearness in setting or in characterization *per se* is, of course, a fundamental essential. Abundance of detail, concreteness of detail, must be clearly observed; but, more than this, the contribution that the clearly defined scene or the accurately portrayed personality makes to the main business of the narrative must be equally evident. For example, it is not enough that the picture of Upper Crowstairs on the boisterous March night of the Fennel christening be so photographic that we can see even the little birds themselves “their tails blown inside out like umbrellas” as they seek security from the storm. The bearing of this tempestuous scene upon the course of the events chronicled must also be evident. Green’s characterization of Queen Elizabeth may be as definite and objective as is her ghastly effigy in Westminster Abbey, yet clearness in historic plot structure is lacking unless we are made to see just how that personality was an essential influence in the events that constitute the Elizabethan Age of English History. And

so is it with details of action: the deeds and words of the man in cinder gray and of the pale-faced third traveler must clearly promote the culmination of the mystery of the three strangers and its resolution. The historical details of war and peace, of intrigue and duplicity, of political, social, and industrial development, — all these must combine to form a distinct trend in the direction of the England that followed Elizabeth's day, if there is to be clearness of plot structure.

## CHAPTER VII

### FORMS OF NARRATIVE LITERATURE

THE discussion of narration has thus far been structural in its application. We have taken up in detail the various elements that contribute to the narrative effect and the rhetorical qualities that are essential to each in turn. The purpose of the present chapter is to review briefly the principal literary forms into which narration may be divided. These we may group as follows:—

- I. The narrative of fact:
  - a. History and memoirs.
  - b. Biography.
- II. The narrative of imagination:
  - a. The Novel.
  - b. The Short-story.

#### I. THE NARRATIVE OF FACT

##### History

It has been said that history is the highest form of literature; that it belongs to a more advanced order of intellectual effort than does the essay, the epic, the lyric, the drama, or the novel. But to attempt any definite ranking of the various forms of literary expression on the basis of comparative excellence is vain. The premises essential to relative judgment are lacking. The effort to demonstrate that Thucydides is superior to Homer, for instance, suggests the type of forensic propositions at one time very popular, such as, Resolved that

Napoleon was a greater man than Shakespeare; that the profession of the law has been of greater benefit to man than has that of medicine; and the like. To prove the superiority of one thing over another we must have some common denominator. But so numerous and so diverse in their essential characteristics are the various types of literature that we cannot thus range them side by side for comparative valuation. The appeal of the drama and the appeal of history, for example, are utterly unlike; to say, then, that *Macbeth* is, as a piece of literature, superior or inferior to the *Germania* or the *Peloponnesian War* is a critical impossibility. And so also of the various phases that constitute narrative writing, — history and the novel, let us say. We may indeed compare them as to the effectiveness of those qualities that they possess in common, — characterization, coherence in organization of plot, and so on, — but we cannot compare them as integral wholes. They are fundamentally unlike. History, in one important sense, is intellectual in essence; fiction is emotional. But every student of literature knows that he cannot decry either of these fundamentals at the expense of the other. Far more reasonable, then, would it be to say no more than this, — that among the forms of narrative writing, history, in the hands of the masters, holds high rank in the scale of literary expression.

From time to time in discussing the various constituent elements of narration we have had occasion to mention their specific application to history as well as to other narrative forms. At this point we may well look for the characteristics that in general distinguish this type of literature and set it apart from the other forms. Various critics of historical literature have laid emphasis on widely differing fundamental qualities as



essential to the historian. We shall perhaps make no serious mistake if we follow the judgment of one who, in spite of glaring faults, yet ranks among the greatest of English historiographers, — Macaulay. Macaulay, in his essay on Hallam's *Constitutional History of England*, has said:—

Mr. Hallam is, on the whole, far better qualified than any other writer of our time for the office which he has undertaken. He has great industry and great acuteness. His knowledge is extensive, various, and profound. His mind is equally distinguished by the amplitude of its grasp, and by the delicacy of its tact. His speculations have none of that vagueness which is the common fault of political philosophy. On the contrary, they are strikingly practical, and teach us not only the general rule, but the mode of applying it to solve particular cases. . . . The language, even where most faulty, is weighty and massive, and indicates strong sense in every line. It often rises to an eloquence, not florid or impassioned, but high, grave, and sober; such as would become a state paper, or a judgment delivered by a great magistrate, a Somers or a D'Aguesseau.

In this respect the character of Mr. Hallam's mind corresponds strikingly with that of his style. His work is eminently judicial. Its whole spirit is that of the bench, not that of the bar. He sums up with a calm, steady impartiality, turning neither to the right nor to the left, glossing over nothing, exaggerating nothing, while the advocates on both sides are alternately biting their lips to hear their conflicting mis-statements and sophisms exposed. On a general survey, we do not scruple to pronounce the *Constitutional History* the most impartial book that we ever read.

What, then, are the essential characteristics that Macaulay here sets down as distinctive of the ideal historian? They would seem to arrange themselves under the following heads:—

1. Industry and extended information.
2. Clear and acute powers of observation.
3. The judicial sense, including
  - a. Keen reasoning power and
  - b. Freedom from prejudice.
4. Power of expression: style.

Of these the first is fundamental to the rest. It is essential that the historian have an extensive fund of data at his command, in order that his powers of selection and of reasoning shall have full play. It may be that, like Thucydides of old, or like John C. Ropes among our own historians, he seeks his material from those who have borne their part in the very incidents that he would chronicle; or, it may be, as with Grote and Macaulay, that he must pore over the records of other chroniclers. In any case, the field of observation must be broad, or generalizations will have little value. Great historians are great students, patient and persistent readers. The author of *The Peloponnesian War* gave the greater part of a long life to collecting the material of his masterpiece. Twelve years of thought and preparation elapsed between the time when Gibbon conceived the plan of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and the appearance of the first volume; twelve more had passed before the last was printed.

But mere industry is not sufficient; with it must go acute power of observation. We have already shown that among the various elements of narration unity is ever essential, and to secure unity there must be power of selection. A mere welter of facts will not enable one to characterize aptly or to record consistently. The charge most frequently brought against Macaulay is that, although his mind was a marvelous storehouse of facts, yet he lacked the power to select and to re-

ject. A picturesque scene, a dramatic character, a stirring situation, would so arouse his imagination that he would give to his theme disproportionate elaboration, and he would treat with scant detail other more prosaic data to the real value of which he was blind. It has been said that in the power to assimilate thoroughly and then to write with ideal conciseness the ancient historians excel the modern; but that in the power to analyze, to establish the sequence of cause and effect, as well as in the power to generalize, the converse is true.

This leads us to note that since the second quarter of the nineteenth century there has been a distinct development of what has been called the "historic sense." That is to say, the methods of science have entered into the field of literature, and such terms as "environment," "heredity," and "evolution" are to-day as common in the vocabulary of literary criticism as in that of biology and physiology. The historian is no longer satisfied to set in order victories by land and by sea, or the bare data of a political campaign; he traces events to their sources, he establishes trends of political development; analysis, synthesis, generalization, the varied tests of evidence, — all these are essential to the very web of his narrative.

At this point we find the articulation between the intellectual and the emotional aspects of historical narrative. The collation of material, the processes of selection and omission, and the judicial attitude toward all matters of historical evidence, are largely questions of intellect. But to the judicial attitude we must of course couple the necessity for impartiality, the discounting of what is usually termed "the personal equation." Historical narrative is ultimately the record of actual fact; truth is its very cornerstone. To the historian — and preëminently to the modern "scientific" historian —

credulity, exaggeration, prejudice are anathema. For the "travelogues" of Herodotus, as for the vigorous pictures of Macaulay, he cares as little as for the romances of Scott or Dumas. And yet it is not to be denied that the Father of History, as well as many of his successors to whom scientific methods were unknown, have produced work that must rank among the permanent monuments of the world's literature. In other words, the literature of history, like all literature, demands something more than facts, however logically ordered and well authenticated. Meteorological or obituary records, parliamentary reports, and state papers may be reliable beyond possibility of question, yet they are not literature. That intangible thing that we call "style" is lacking, and in all those records of thought that the world does not willingly let die style in some form exists. The attempts to define this abstraction have been legion, but in this respect there is little deviation among them, that in some indefinable way style carries with it the individuality of the writer. In one of its aspects, therefore, literature is personal. The historian, then, must not limit himself to the bare registration of facts, however true, or to processes of reasoning, however logical. Nor, on the other hand, although in his exhilaration he may compose periods that rival in fervor those of Milton or Ruskin, will he allow himself to be swept away by enthusiasm or prejudice. The dignity of historical narrative lies in the nice adjustment of all the constituent qualities.

Among these qualities are accuracy and interest. Macaulay's purpose was to be interesting, to write a history that should supersede the latest romance on the tables of young ladies. Of his success there can be no question. Picturesque setting, vigorous characterization, and a marvelous style contribute to give

vigor to the main business of the narrative. But his very energy, often lapsing into superheated enthusiasm and prejudice, has done much to imperil his standing among the great historians. Froude is even a more striking example, for in his case the inaccuracies are so serious as to offset the virtues of his style. It has been said that in a short time one comes to know Macaulay so well as to discount his exaggerations and not miss the truth; but that Froude's inaccuracies are constitutional and inexplicable.

Interest and accuracy, however, are not incompatible, as may be seen in the case of the great English master of historical writing. "Gibbon," says J. F. Rhodes, quoting Bury, "is 'the historian and the man of letters,' thus ranking with Thucydides and Tacitus. These three are put in the highest class, exemplifying that 'brilliance of style and accuracy of statement are perfectly compatible in an historian.'"

Scientific adherence to truth, on the one hand, and adequate expression, on the other, between which history must steer its course, without veering unduly toward either if it would be regarded as literature, have their own definite relations to each of the three main contributive elements under which we have considered narrative writing.

In the first place, the historian will lay less stress on dramatic setting than will the writer of fiction. Dramatic setting makes for æsthetic effectiveness; its appeal is in large degree to the imagination; it is likely to lead one aside into the realm of fantasy. In fiction, on the other hand, where the imagination plays so important a rôle, dramatic setting is correspondingly more important and may be used with far greater freedom. With expository setting the danger of over-emphasis is less,

for, in this case, the background increases the effect of the action, at the same time presenting only details that have as much basis in fact as does the action itself. *The Decline and Fall*, to be sure, abounds in gorgeous imagery and pageants, yet the value of the great work as veritable history is not lessened by the richness of the coloring. Here and there a voice is raised in accusation of pomposity and bombast, but the general consensus of critical opinion is in accord with the verdict of Mommsen, the great German historian, who wrote:

Amid all the changes that have come over the study of the history of the Roman Empire, in spite of all the rush of the new evidence that has poured in upon us and almost overwhelmed us, in spite of changes which must be made, in spite of alterations of view, or alterations even in the aspect of great characters, no one would in the future be able to read the history of the Roman Empire unless he read, possibly with a fuller knowledge, but with the broad views, the clear insight, the strong grasp of Edward Gibbon.<sup>1</sup>

With characterization history is more closely concerned than with setting. "Give me the series of great men," has said an eminent writer, "and I will tell you the history of the race; because history is best represented by important individuals." If this be true, it becomes evident that the portrayal of personages and the exposition of personality will enter very definitely into the record of events in which human agency plays its part. At this very point, however, lies the danger of personal bias on the part of the historian with consequent failure to maintain the judicial impartiality fundamental to the historic sense. Toward the impersonal background the historian feels no prejudice, save as he

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J. F. Rhodes from *London Times*, Nov. 16, 1894, in *Historical Essays*.

may be æsthetically attracted or repelled by its artistic possibilities. But once confront him with men of like passions with himself, and straightway a partisan attitude becomes easy. Oddly enough we find the readiest example of this in the very historian whom we have quoted as praising another for unprejudiced judgment. Although Macaulay wrote of Hallam as already cited on page 241, yet Macaulay's own inability to maintain a judicial calm in his estimate of great historical characters has become a proverb. No one can read his *History* or his essays without realizing his violent partisanship. Elijah Impey is a political time-server; Newcastle a driveling idiot; Charles I. "a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy." On the other hand, of William of Orange and of all those statesmen who stood as champions for constitutional liberty and against high prerogative it might indeed be inferred that, like the Puritans, they were noblemen by the imposition of the hand of God, ministered to and inspired by the angels of the Most High. But this consistent attitude as counsel for the prosecution or for the defence is fatal to the expository purpose of history.

Characterization, too, like setting, emphasizes the restrictions of historical narrative as opposed to the greater liberty of fiction. Scott creates a personality that shall render his story most effective. If his Richard is in harmony with the Richard of the Crusades, so much the better; the chronicles of history serve as useful auxiliaries. If, on the other hand, he is totally untrue to all record, so much the worse for history; the story is more effective than if the King of the Lion-Heart had been portrayed consistently with the accounts to be found in the chronicles of Benedict of Peterborough. Similarly, the conception of Harold the Saxon derivable

from the ancient records of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle may be disappointingly at variance with that which we draw from Bulwer's *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*; but the veritable son of Godwin was not artistically adapted to the events that constitute the plot of Bulwer's romance. The chronicler and the writer of romance has each his own field and his own ultimate purpose in characterization. Clearness and truth are the goal of the one; clearness and effectiveness the goal of the other.

Finally as to action: here, in one respect, at least, the historian must even more definitely part company with any possible personal idiosyncrasies and bias. His events are already matters of record. Imagination is fettered by fact. But, even though thus restricted, originality is not precluded. In the most extensive history the quality of selection must be exercised. No historian ever utilized all the material at hand. One's attitude to life, one's economic and political convictions, will determine the selection and the ordering of the details chosen for record. But here again enters the peril of personal bias. The law courts supply daily evidence of how the same circumstances seen by two persons are capable of totally different presentation. The question of proportion alone is fundamental in its relation to the ultimate interpretation that shall be placed, let us say, upon the details of a campaign or the development of a social institution. Witness the variations that appear in school histories as to the events of the Civil War of 1861-65, or in religious histories as to the relations between the Anglican Church of to-day and that of the English Reformation under Henry VIII. Originality, too, will appear in the sources from which one chooses his material. A history of American politics compiled from



contemporary newspapers and periodicals will differ materially in substance and spirit from another based on standard histories, biographies, and state papers. Certainly some of the originality that distinguishes Von Holst's account of American History of the years 1850-60 may be attributed to his painstaking study of the newspapers of that period. And his originality of procedure is further shown in his odd method of mastering the English language through the medium of newspaper advertisements. Indeed, we might have included originality as one of the qualities that, in one form or another, are essential to all narrative deserving the name of history.

Another fact that may be noted in connection with action as an element in historical narrative is that the very nature of the material puts a practical check upon plot complication. The purpose of dramatic or of story plot (p. 203) is to secure suspense and emphasis through an unexpected *dénouement*. This is not the aim of historical narrative. The reader is in all probability perfectly familiar with the ultimate culmination; his interest lies in tracing the individual details or the trend of related events that lead up to the culmination. Consequently any complication of plot strands, any carefully laid plan of mystification, such as is familiar in the short-story or the novel, would serve but to hamper the main purpose of the history. The principle of culmination appears in the historian's endeavor to show the inevitable train of causation leading to the conclusion foreseen from the beginning. The sudden occurrence of the unexpected that gives to *Marjorie Daw* its characteristic note would hardly do in an historical account of the battle of Marathon. The reader would certainly have reason for criticism should the historian so juggle his

facts as to lead up to the apparently inevitable conclusion that the troops of Datis were gaining a glorious victory, and should then close with some such unexpected culmination as this: —

But as the sun sank low in the west, the Asiatic invaders, disheartened and unnerved at the losses inflicted by the forces of Miltiades, launched their galleys in headlong flight, while the Greeks, though fatigued by the day's struggle, were already preparing for a night's march across the hills of Attica to forestall a possible attack upon the city.

From these various considerations it is clear that in the very constituents of narration, — setting, characterization, and plot, — the purely scientific aspect of history is not sufficient. The personal side, apparent in originality of method, in intelligent ordering of material, and in selection of contributive detail is constantly in evidence. And this fact, in conjunction with the subjective quality that we call style, combines to lift history from the dead level of mere informatory exposition and give to it the dignity of literature.

### Biography

Biographical narrative, including the autobiography and the memoir, is a variety of history modified by conditions peculiar to itself. The fundamental requisites of historical narrative still remain: the biographer must, like the historian, exercise industry in the effort to collate all possible material, so that his work shall not be untrue because of inadequate information; he must also possess the clearness of observation and the judicial acuteness that characterize the historian, otherwise his record will have little value to the seeker after truth; and, finally, if the biography is to take rank as literature,

it must be composed with due regard for "proper words in proper places," — that is, for style.

The biographer is the microscopist among historians; he presents the minute details that in the wider narrative would be in violation of due proportion. He works in a much narrower circle. Instead of picturing the life-history of a nation or even an epoch in a nation's career, he elaborates the miniature of a single personality that may have played an important part in the national life or in the epoch. Instead of a History of the English Reformation or of The Oxford Movement, he writes a Life of Oliver Cromwell or of John Henry Newman.

All that has been said, therefore, in relation to historical narrative may, *mutatis mutandis*, be applied to biographical literature. Regarding one phase of this type of writing, the autobiography, however, some additional comment should be made, for although like all biography, it is but a microscopic cross-section of history, yet it possesses certain well-marked characteristics of its own.

In one sense of the word biography may be considered as essentially objective in character. Of course, if it be literature at all, it must be subjective to the extent of reflecting in some degree the author's personality, as has already been noted in connection with style; but biography may be called objective to this extent, — that its principal value lies in the light reflected upon the career and personality of him about whom it is written and not upon that of him who writes it. The ultimate purpose of Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, for example, is to throw light upon the life and character of the great novelist. It may reflect much of the biographer's individuality as well, but that is, to the average reader, only a by-product, and is of material value only to the student

who may be seeking details regarding Lockhart himself or his personal style of expression. With the autobiography, however, it is radically different. Attention is now focused upon the writer and upon the characteristics of his individuality, rather than upon the externals of his life-story. We are interested in the writer's portrait of himself; that is, in him not as seen through the eyes of the world but as reflected from within.

In her extensive work *The Autobiography*, Mrs. Anna Robeson Burr finds her definition of this phase of narrative writing in the preface of Marie Bashkirtsev's *Journal d'une Jeune Artiste* in the following passage:—

If I should not live long enough to become famous, this journal will be interesting to psychologists. The record of a woman's life, written down day by day, without any attempt at concealment, as if no one in the world were to read it, yet with the purpose of being read, is always interesting. If this book is not the exact, the absolute, the strict truth, it has no *raison d'être*.

In this passage, Mrs. Burr tells us, two elements are at once evident, — both of which we have already found to be essential to historical writing: (a) the attempt at impartial chronicling of fact, and (b) the endeavor so to phrase the thought that it shall be read, that is, shall secure something of the permanence that belongs to literature. Absolute ingenuousness, then, being a prerequisite to effective autobiography, it is evident that the impulse with which the composition takes rise will have no little weight in determining its value. And the autobiographical motives are numerous. Mrs. Burr, for example, has distinguished no less than thirteen, such as financial return, the uses of posterity, religious witness, the mere pleasure of recalling the past, interest in self-

study, the interests of science. It is not difficult to see that, with these impulses, there will be a difference in the resulting truthfulness of the self-portrayal, and consequently in the biographical value of the work. The writer who, like the traveler, being desirous merely of acquainting his reader with strange conditions of men and manners, casts his narrative in autobiographical form, will, almost of necessity, sacrifice the first of the principles that Mrs. Burr has declared essential to the type, and will devote greater attention to the second. The value of the autobiographic narrative will thus depend largely on objective considerations rather than on subjective, as it should to secure the greatest value.

It is clear, too, in view of the ultimate purpose of the autobiography, why abridgments by other hands than those of the autobiographer possess little ultimate value. What the editor shall omit, what he shall retain, must depend upon *his* taste, upon *his* judgment of the personality incorporated in the self-revelation. And the editor's judgment is the very thing that, autobiographically, the reader cares nothing about. It introduces an element wholly alien to the very nature of the autobiographic type.

In common with history, all biographical writing is free to make use of all the adjuncts of narration. The environment amidst which a character grows to maturity, the complexities that combine to make up the unity that distinguish the individual, the various episodes that, in coherent train, culminate with the close of a career, — all these are ready to the hand of the biographer, whether he chronicle the life-story of another or whether, seeing with "the inward eye," he record the thoughts that are known only to himself. One difference in proportion, however, we may note before dis-

missing the subject: in history the elements of setting and character are but accessory, and therefore subordinate to the series of actual events. In other words, "the story is the thing." But with biographical narrative, and particularly with autobiography, the element of characterization moves up into first place. Background and action are but contributory. The Man himself becomes supreme.

## II. THE NARRATIVE OF IMAGINATION

### The Novel

The term *novel* is as familiar as the term *literature* or *style* or *criticism*, and is often used with about the same degree of exactness in denotation. Attempts at definition have frequently been made by writers on the art of fiction as well as by novelists themselves, and it is interesting to note how the various results throw stress upon widely differing elements. One writer will emphasize amusement and mental relaxation as fundamental; another will specify the passion of love as the essential motive; a third will insist upon the realistic reproduction of actual life; a fourth, that the narrative be morally instructive; and still a fifth, that there be a conscientious and accurate portrayal of character.<sup>1</sup> An interesting phenomenon attendant upon these various attempts to define the term *novel* is that, as they become more and more modern, the element of character portrayal becomes increasingly important. This is quite in keeping with the trend from objective to subjective characterization already referred to in chapter v. In general, however, the definitions of one generation differ

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of this matter see Horne's *Technique of the Novel*, chap. II.

so widely from those of another that what an eighteenth-century writer would unhesitatingly term a "novel" would, in our time, seem to demand quite different classification.

This changing point of view as to the exact nature of the novel is further shown by a marked difference of opinion as to what shall be honored as the first novel. The rank of priority has been awarded to *The Amadis of Gaul* (1470 ?), to Madame Lafayette's *Princess of Clèves* (1678), to Marivaux's *Marianne* (about 1731), to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Here, of course, the variation in judgment results from lack of unanimity among critics as to the basic essentials of the novel-type. Professor Horne, in his *Technique of the Novel*, has thus summed up these various essentials: —

A novel, then, consists of the gathering of a single series of human, that is to say, emotional events from out the vast whirl of loosely related incidents which we call "the world." It endeavors to trace a series of causes to their series of effects. Rejecting all the intervening masses of irrelevant matter which make the lessons of life so hard to read, the novel points, or should point as clearly as it can, the winding of the road down which some soul has traveled, the goal which, if another mortal follow the same route, he also is most likely to reach. "Quo Vadis" should be the title not of one story, but of all.<sup>1</sup>

In that it seeks to "trace a series of causes to their series to effects" the novel must possess plot. In that this series shall be one of "human" and "emotional" events, the novel must include characterization. And in that it shall "point as clearly as it can the winding of the road down which some soul has traveled," the novel may util-

<sup>1</sup> Horne's *Technique of the Novel*. By permission of Harper and Brothers. Copyright, 1908, by Harper and Brothers.

ize setting and descriptive detail. Furthermore style — the personal element in composition — will certainly play an important *rôle*, if the novel is to portray with effectiveness the course of individual growth or decay.

Finally, it will be noted that the definition of the novel may be extended so as to include the extremes of realistic narrative on the one hand and of imaginative license on the other. The sequence of human events chronicled may take place in the Black Forest or in the Forest of Arden; on Long Island or on some fabled Atlantis. And the events themselves may range from the photographic details of the Chicago stock-yards to the romantic adventures of Argalus and Parthenia in the shadowy groves of Arcadia. The "human and emotional" events are not at variance with truth because, perchance, they are not a record of actual facts.<sup>1</sup> Hence we have the realism of Zola and the imagination of Hawthorne. In other words, a definition of the *novel* must be broad enough to include what is generally known as the *romance*, and the attempt to differentiate these two terms is one reason for the disparity that we have already noted among the conflicting definitions of the literary type under discussion.

From what has been presented thus briefly, it is clear that the novel offers the broadest possible field for the genius of the narrative writer. On no side is he limited so strictly as is the historiographer or the biographer. If his attitude to life be that of the fatalist, he will draw his narrative to that dark pattern, and "Time, the arch-satirist, will have his joke out" to the end. If, again, he sees the world through a brighter, more cheerful glass, he will conduct his hero through many adventures, at the

<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of "truth" and "fact," see Winchester's *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp. 148-52.



hands, it may be, of Fagins and Quilps, but at the end will leave him amid prosperity and success. Or, again, the novelist may be artistically alive to the colors and the voices of nature;

The tall rock  
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
Their colors and their forms,

may have peculiar charm; then, in some *Choir Invisible* or *Lorna Doone*, he will picture setting with an elaboration of detail that considerations of proportion would render quite impossible to the historian. Or, perhaps, motives rather than action may make the strongest appeal; in that case, like George Eliot or George Meredith, he will give himself to characterization as far as is consistent with interest. In other words, the novel offers a field in which the genius of the narrator may range practically without limit.

No consideration of the literature of fiction would be complete without reference to its two important aspects, the realistic and the romantic. The terms *realism* and *romance* are often used as if there were a fundamental difference between the subject-matter of the one and of the other: as if, that is to say, Thackeray chose one class of material and Scott another quite unlike it. Yet if one will place *Henry Esmond* side by side with *Waverley*, one will discover no fundamental difference between the materials used. In fact, the romantic novelist and even the historian or the biographer frequently utilize the same subject-matter. The reader of *Kenilworth*, for example, or of *Westward Ho!* will recognize the same faces and many of the very events that he finds on the pages of all chronicles of Elizabethan England or in the biographies of English worthies famous in the sixteenth century. The difference is not in the material; it is in the very nature

of the writer and in his manner of approaching his subject. The realist and the romancist alike are concerned with the world of actuality, but one is inspired by what it is; the other, by what it suggests. We might say that the realist is moved by the denotative possibilities of his world; the romancist, by the connotative. Both realism and romance are ultimately based upon truth, upon conformity to what the writer believes to be the fixed laws of life. *Silas Marner* rests on what was to George Eliot an ultimate truth — that the individual soul attains its fullest growth only through a process of self-abnegation and love for others. And underlying *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* is Scott's inborn enthusiasm for chivalry, for the conventions typified by belt and spur, spear and lance, by the loyalty that made Toryism as essential a part of his personality as democracy was a part of Lafayette's or of Jefferson's. Scott's loyalty to tradition is ultimately and fundamentally based on a truth.

But the facts which the novelist selects for setting forth his truth are a wholly different matter. They bear to it much the same relation that the premises of an argument bear to the conclusion, the material to the finished product, the part to the whole. The facts of *Silas Marner* are the various individual occurrences that in their entirety set forth the altruistic formula underlying the novel. The facts of *Ivanhoe* are the various narrative details that in their entirety establish the ultimate truth of Scott's creed. And it is by his attitude to his facts that we determine whether a writer inclines toward realism or toward romance.

The realist assumes to his facts something of the attitude of the scientist. To him they are the data upon which the final judgment as to his ground truth is to be based. With them he must take no liberties. Actuality,

photographic exactness, truth to the phenomena of experience are axiomatic principles not to be trifled with. Of each the reader must be able to say "How real!" The course of Colonel Newcome's life, the characterization of Godfrey Cass, Norris's picture of the Wheat Pit, — all are illustrations of the novelist's ability to catch with exactness the trend of circumstance, the shadow of personality, the details of background. They proceed from the same loyalty to the actual that characterizes the scientist in his laboratory. Of course, the individual incidents with which the realist works are the offspring of his imagination; otherwise his work would be history or biography. Yet his imagination does not run uncurbed. The rational basis of scientific generalization constantly exercises restraint upon him. Experience, consciously or unconsciously, stands by his side as mentor. In this respect, then, that his attitude is largely one of careful attention to accuracy of detail, which step by step, here a little and there a little, ultimately establishes the basic truth, the realist pursues a method analogous to that of the inductive reasoner.

In view of this attitude of mind, we find that the realist is impatient with mere conventionalism, because it is too vague, too general, because it lacks individuality. To him much of the literature of the eighteenth century makes slight appeal; it is as artificial as the turrets and battlements of Strawberry Hill or of Abbotsford. He is impatient, too, with sentimentalism and mere imaginativeness, because they do not rest upon the more substantial foundations of intellectual experience. To him, as to materialists of the Macaulay type, "fifty years of Europe is better than a cycle of Cathay." Furthermore, he does not sympathize with the idealist who omits defects and pictures conditions that are unnaturally perfect

and intellectually impossible. Little Nell and Paul Dombey are not delightful, and the London pickpockets of the Artful Dodger school are as unreal as the winged creatures that characterize armorial bearings. The realist will portray men and life as he finds them; pleasantness and unpleasantness are but accidents, to be regarded merely as so much material. The novel is too serious a form of literature to be hampered by the considerations of "virginibus puerisque." In his sincerity the realist portrays a Jude Fawley or an Arabella Donn, and when an indignant public protests against his frankness he lays aside his pen and refuses to write further rather than sacrifice his loyalty to things as they are.

Very different is the attitude of the writer of romance. His work, too, springs from the seed of truth, as has already been said, but he is concerned principally with the matter of effective presentation. In a very large and general way, his rhetorical guide is emphasis; of the realist it is clearness. He may perhaps feel that to restrict himself to the mere commonplaces of prosaic experience would be to lose power, and he does not hesitate to draw men and motives to a scale unknown in everyday life. If, for the effective presentation of his story, he must take liberties with time and place, he is not unwilling to lay violent hands upon history and geography. *Kenilworth* is no less effective because it portrays Shakspeare as the great poet at a time when, as a matter of recorded chronicle, he was robbing orchards about Stratford, nor *The Antiquary* because, to fit the exigencies of setting, the author makes the sun sink behind the eastern hills of Scotland. Indeed, if to the setting forth of his truth the known world does not adapt itself, the romancist is always at liberty to discover a world of his own, as does Bulwer in *The Coming Race*. In short, the roman-

cist is not subject to the shackling limitations of prosaic fact. He rises far above the rational method of his fellow-craftsman, the realist. He exemplifies the freedom of the unrestricted imagination.

As methods of thought and feeling change, now realism and now romance will seem to voice most effectively the spirit of the time. But, realist and romancist will always exist as long as some men are moved mainly by the intellectual aspects of truth and others by impatience at imaginative restraint. We shall always find the fidelity to fact characteristic of Thackeray and Trollope, and also the romantic imagery of Hawthorne and Stevenson.

### The Short-story

Of the various forms of narrative composition no one type has been the subject of more extended critical discussion than has the short-story. The term is unfortunate because it encourages confusion between the short-story and the story that is merely short, and these two forms are by no means identical. We have adopted the hyphenated form suggested by Professor Brander Matthews, as presenting a distinction between the two types.

The short story is no new form of narration, distinctive of the nineteenth century. From the earliest times we find it. In the camp, at the city gate, in the king's court, in the robbers' cave, men have always listened to the recital of adventure or to the tale of love. *Egyptian Tales*, a collection edited by W. M. Flinders Petrie, contains short stories that have been preserved on papyrus for thousands of years. The Bible is a repository of short tales, like *Ruth* and *Esther* and others familiar to every reader. *The Thousand-and-one-Nights* is universally known.

But the short-story is all that they are and something more; and it is the short-story that in recent years has risen to a position of great importance in the literature of fiction. Perhaps one reason for the increased popularity of this brief narrative form is to be found in the present-day impatience that demands time-saving devices in every field of activity: in the work-shop, in the counting-room, in the house of God. There was a time when our ancestors were content to follow through a half dozen or more volumes the fortunes of Sir Charles Grandison or of *Clarissa Harlowe*; nowadays the length of De Morgan's single-volume novels provides ready material for adverse criticism. But beyond the perennial interest in a narrative that does not demand extended attention on the part of the reader, and beyond the modern utilitarian demand for economy of time, lies this critical fact, — that the short-story has developed possibilities as an art form until it is entitled to a place quite its own in narrative literature.

Under the title of the *tale* we may include those specimens of narrative fiction less extended than the novel with all its detail of background, characterization, and plot. But aside from its length, the tale possesses no characteristics peculiar to itself. It is conventional narrative; its nature is stated in the definitions to be found on the first page of this book; its purpose may be didactic, as in the case of parables and allegories, or it may be written merely to afford relaxation; it may be the elaboration of a single episode, or it may contain many episodes; it may stand apart, as in the case of *Ruth* or *Esther*, or it may be framed within a larger narrative environment, as in the case of *Wandering Willie's Tale* in Scott's *Redgauntlet* or *The Story of the Man of the Hill* in Fielding's *Tom Jones*. But the short-story, as it has been developed

in the recent literature of fiction, possesses marked characteristics that differentiate it from this broader type.

We need not attempt to trace from Oriental, classic, and mediæval sources the literary genealogy and history of the short-story; such investigation lies outside the scope of our work. We may accept the type as we find it to-day, and proceed at once to examine its structure.

A convenient starting-point presents itself in the words of one of the masters of short-story composition. In a review of Hawthorne's *Tales*, Edgar Allan Poe wrote: —

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived with deliberate care a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents — he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel, Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided.

Here we would seem to have two distinct processes of narrative composition: one illustrated by the story-teller whose principal concern is to marshal his narrative incidents; and the other by the writer whose aim is, by his incidents — in this case but a means to an end — to put into objective form the “certain unique or single *effect*” which he has conceived. And this singleness of effect,

this uniqueness, is the hall-mark of typical short-stories. Take, for instance, Maupassant's *Happiness*. The germ of this simple story, more easily felt than expressed, may perhaps be found in solution in the apparently trivial question put by one of the company at the beginning of the narrative: "Can one remain in love for several years in succession?" It is as if with this core thought in his mind, Maupassant had combined such events as might best aid him in establishing this effect. Or, again, take such familiar stories as *A New England Nun*, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, *The Ambitious Guest*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, or *The Withered Arm*, and a little thought will reveal a nucleus idea around which the incidents of the story gather and which they serve to set forth in tangible, effective form.

This same fundamental "uniqueness" of purpose may be seen by a reversal of the foregoing method. Instead of proceeding from the finished composition, we may begin at the opposite extreme of the process. Let us suppose, for example, a person passing a jeweler's show-windows on a city street. As he pauses to look at the costly array set forth to attract the passer-by, he notices that two women are, like himself, earnestly regarding the display. The one by her attire gives every evidence of wealth; the other is garbed in the sober vestments of a religious order. Each is unconscious of observation; each evidently admires the glittering ornaments, the gold, the precious stones. Suddenly the first turns and enters the shop; the other, suppressing quickly the suspicion of a sigh, passes on her way. Here is abundant material for reflection. The observer's thoughts may easily centre upon a very definite and individual experience in life. If he is possessed of the imaginative genius of Hawthorne or of Maupassant, he may discover here the germ



principle of an effective short-story, for which he may invent such incidents as will best set forth his conception.

Hawthorne's note-book abounds in just such hints as this for subsequent development into short-story form. For instance, we read: —

A company of persons to drink a certain medicinal preparation, which would prove a poison, or the contrary, according to their different characters.

To poison a person or a party of persons with the sacramental wine.

A dreadful secret to be communicated to several people of various characters, — grave or gay, and they all to become insane, according to their characters, by the influence of the secret.

A person to be the death of his beloved in trying to raise her to more than mortal perfection; yet this should be a comfort to him for having aimed so highly and holily.

A change from a gay young girl to an old woman; the melancholy events, the effects of which have clustered around her character, and gradually imbued it with their influence, till she becomes a lover of sick-chambers, taking pleasure in receiving dying breaths and in laying out the dead; also having her mind full of funeral reminiscences, and possessing more acquaintances beneath the burial turf than above it.

This power to catch the fleeting shadow of some great truth, the hint of some dramatic crisis, or the flash of some momentary emotion, and then to phrase it effectively in narrative setting requires artistic sense of no little delicacy. Of this imaginative gift, Professor Bliss Perry in *A Study of Prose Fiction* has written: —

It [the short-story] calls for visual imagination of a high order: the power to see the object; to penetrate to its essential

nature; to select the one characteristic trait by which it may be represented. A novelist informs you that his heroine, let us say, is seated in a chair by the window. He tells you what she looks like: her attitude, *figuré*, hair, and eyes, and so forth. He can do this, and very often seems to do it, without really seeing that individual woman or making us see her. His trained pencil merely sketches some one of the same general description, of about the equivalent hair and eyes, and so forth, seated by that general kind of a window. If he does not succeed in making her real to us in that pose, he has a hundred other opportunities before the novel ends. . . . If one scene does not present her vividly to us, the chances are that another will, and in the end, it is true, we have an absolutely distinct image of her. The short-story writer, on the other hand, has but the one chance. His task, compared with that of the novelist, is like bringing down a flying bird with one bullet, instead of banging away with a whole handful of birdshot and having another barrel in reserve. Study the descriptive epithets in Stevenson's short-stories. How they bring down the object! What an eye! And what a hand! No adjective that does not paint a picture or record a judgment! And if it were not for a boyish habit of showing off his skill and doing trick shots for us out of mere superfluity of cleverness, what judge of marksmanship would refuse Master Robert Louis Stevenson the prize?

If, now, bearing in mind this power of penetrating to the very soul of an event or of a series of events, one will turn to a typical tale, he will be conscious of a distinct difference between it and the typical short-story. The story of Ruth will serve for illustration. After reading this, does one not carry away with him the impression of a series of incidents rather than of a germ-thought from which all proceeds? He thinks of Naomi's affliction, of Ruth gleaning after the reapers or sleeping at the feet of Boaz, of the gathering of the elders at the gate, and of the birth of Obed. The tale is not drawn to a narrative pat-

tern with careful elimination of every detail that shall not contribute to the setting forth of a single situation, a single emotion, a single effect.

Hawthorne in his note-book wrote:—

The semblance of a human face to be formed on the side of a mountain, or in the fracture of a small stone, by a *lusus naturæ*. The face is an object of curiosity for years or centuries, and by and by a boy is born, whose features gradually assume the aspect of that portrait. At some critical juncture, the resemblance is found to be perfect. A prophecy may be connected.

Later he composed *The Great Stone Face*. To this story in relation to its germ, as set forth in the note-book entry, we may easily apply Stevenson's words in a letter to a friend:

I never use an effect when I can help it, unless it prepares the effects that are to follow; that's what a story consists in. To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong. The *dénouement* of a long story is nothing, it is just "a full close," which you may approach and accomplish as you please — it is a code, not an essential member in the rhythm; but the body and end of a short-story is bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the beginning.

The end of Hawthorne's story is of a part with the beginning; it could end only as it does and yet fulfill the author's purpose. But it would be impossible to make similar application of Stevenson's principle to the story of Ruth, of Joseph and his brethren, of Aladdin and his magic lamp, of Reynard the Fox.

Mr. Clayton Hamilton has thus formulated a definition of the short-story:—

The aim of a short-story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Materials and Methods of Fiction*. By permission of The Baker and Taylor Co., New York.

And to the composition of such a type of narrative we may apply with slight change the words of Stevenson with regard to the general art of fiction: that "from all its sentences it will echo and reëcho its own controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute; the style must be pitched in unison with this; and if anywhere there is a word that looks another way, the story would be better without it."

It is evident, then, that the principle of unity is peculiarly applicable to the short-story in its modern form. Of no phase of fiction is it so true that every word, every detail that is not for it is against it. Exigencies of space alone preclude anything most remotely suggestive of digression. Consequently the writer of the short-story works under peculiarly restricted conditions. It may be that some impression of character furnishes inspiration for the narrative. But the writer has no opportunities for developing delicate shadings, the play of various motives, the successive stages that in their entirety constitute a personality. The realm of character *development* is not for him. Compare, for example, the portrayal of Markheim with that of Tito in *Romola*. It is in the personality of Stevenson's hero, as in George Eliot's, that we are most interested. But we must catch the one at a glance, at the crisis of his life; we secure our insight into the other by a series of carefully elaborated situations and expositions. The one is flashed upon us; the other is wrought out only with most painstaking detail. As a study in characterization the short-story is restricted to dramatic moments or to personalities that are in themselves unique. The commonplace man of the street does not offer promising material for short-story characterization, although we must not forget that under an apparently commonplace exterior there may be the unique

possibilities of a Louisa Ellis, as in *A New England Nun*, or of an Ernest, as in *The Great Stone Face*.

The essential unity of the short-story exercises restriction also upon the writer who finds his theme in some aspect of setting, in some note pervading nature and general environment. For wonderful unity of tone, of atmosphere, such stories as *The Fall of the House of Usher* or *The Masque of the Red Death* are cases in point. James Lane Allen in *The Choir Invisible* or Blackmore in *Lorna Doone* have given marvelous examples of background portrayal; but in neither case was the artist under the compelling obligation that constrained Poe to blend every color and to harmonize every detail in order to produce a single impression, a single emotion. It is not for the writer of the short-story to draw Nature in every mood, but rather to catch some single aspect. Like Maupassant in *Happiness* he must choose only those effects that accentuate the germinal idea from which the story itself emanates.

So, too, in reference to plot: the novelist and, in less degree, the writer of the tale have free hand with incident and episode that shall ultimately combine in the general unity of effect disclosed in the culmination. But the short-story can seldom embrace more than a single main action, and that must be capable of ready interpretation as clearly setting forth the cardinal idea. The story of Colonel Newcome's life and the meteoric career of Haman possess unity indeed, but each is far more differentiated in detail, more consecutive and less concentrated than the story of Mathilde Loisel or of John Oakhurst. Mérimée's *Taking of the Redoubt* is a noteworthy instance of classic simplicity and freedom from all details that do not directly contribute to the main narrative end. The story is an impressionistic descrip-

tion of the emotions of men brought face to face with death. Not only does Mérimée efface himself completely from his narrative, but he so compresses his plot by the elimination of every non-contributive detail that his story moves undeviatingly on to its goal.

As with unity of structure, so with coherence. The short-story exacts a conciseness and compactness quite foreign to the novel and even to the tale. The deliberation that characterizes the dramatic structure of *Richard Yea-and-Nay*, for instance, as shown in the analysis presented on pp. 230-31, or of *Esther*, as shown on pp. 205-17, is impossible in the typical short-story, and, although a general adjustment to the methods of the more extended narrative forms may often be discovered, as in the case of *The Black Poodle* (pp. 222-24), yet it is in outline rather than in detail. The most effective plan of structure is that in which each detail leads unerringly to the final culmination. The incidents accumulate, each bringing the reader closer and closer to the goal. He may not be conscious whither he is tending, but the coherence of event after event leads him on surely to the inevitable issue. This is especially clear in the case of "hoax plots," like *Marjorie Daw* and *The Lady or the Tiger?* in which the reader suddenly finds himself completely hoodwinked, but realizes that it is all his own fault and that from the beginning the trend of events has been thoroughly consecutive and logical. A good example of this coherent structure is to be found in Balzac's *La Grande Bretèche*. The point of view changes repeatedly from that of the narrator to that of one or another of the actors; yet, when one has completed the narrative, he realizes how many unnoted incidents, apparently trivial, are essential links in the plot-chain, and the story conveys not only the impres-

sion of perfect unity but of carefully planned sequence as well.

While the short-story may concern itself with a single incident, as in the case of *Markheim*, it frequently has occasion to use the episodic form; and the linking of the episodes then becomes a very critical consideration in view of the compact unity and coherence essential to the type. This difficulty may be met by a careful process (1) of subordination or (2) of close coördination. Mérimée's *Taking of the Redoubt* is an excellent illustration of the first. The reader does not instinctively divide this into individual episodes of equal rank: (1) The arrival in camp on the evening of September 4; (2) the events of the night before the battle; (3) the opening of the battle; (4) the assault on the redoubt. Rather all merge into (4). The presentation of the young lieutenant to his captain becomes merely introductory and fades insensibly into (2), which in turn, in the very middle of a sentence, resolves itself into (3), all the episodes standing in distinct subordination to the main theme of the story. Morrison's *On the Stairs* is another instance, less smooth, perhaps, in mechanical execution, yet revealing the distinctly subordinate rôle of the contributory incidents.

*The Great Stone Face* and *Flute and Violin* are examples of the coördinating structure. Here the bond of coherence appears in the close sequence by which event follows logically upon event. The transition between the consecutive stages in Ernest's career is traceable in such expressions as

The years went on, and Ernest ceased to be a boy. He had grown to be a man now, etc.

More years sped swiftly and tranquilly away. Ernest still dwelt in his native valley, and was now a man of middle age, etc.

The years hurried onward, treading in their haste on one another's heels. And now they began to bring white hairs, and scatter them over the head of Ernest; they made reverend wrinkles across his forehead, and furrows in his cheeks. He was an aged man, etc.

The reader passes from stage to stage without perceptible jar, guided by the thread of chronological succession and the gradual development and growing maturity of Ernest's personality.

In *Flute and Violin* the episode gradations are emphasized by the division of the story into sections, or miniature chapters. But so intimately are they bound together by the temporal and logical inter-relations already set forth on pp. 167-72 that the final effect is one of entire coherence and natural transition from the August evening in 1809, when the parson makes his first appearance, until 1814, when "loved and revered, he passed onward to the close."

This matter of episodic coördination is intimately allied to the matter of proportion and emphasis. It may be that the essential episode, or event, is, in matter of actual space assigned, inferior to the preliminary and the supplementary matter. But, if this be the case, the author must be sensitive to what we may call the potentiality of his main incident: it must possess sufficient dynamic power to impress itself on the reader, or the essential quality of the short-story is lost. Of the sixty pages of *Flute and Violin*, for example, perhaps not more than one tenth of that number is devoted to the elaboration of the episode that is the germ of the whole story, but the pathos of that one, its emotional force, is sufficient to make of it a centre from which all the others radiate.



This nice adjustment of proportion and force is often secured by the effective device of an intense conclusion. "Hoax-plot" stories all illustrate this device, as do all those constructed on the plan already illustrated by the diagram in figure 11 on page 221. The concluding sentence reveals effectively the destination of the plot-course, and relieves the suspense that has been accumulating through the various episodes. Examples of such conclusions have already been indicated in the discussion of emphasis in plot structure.

From all these considerations it is apparent that the rhetorical qualities of the short-story — coherence, emphasis, proportion — all lead ultimately back to unity as the essential and all-pervading quality of structure. If it lacks this one-ness of tone, this complete subordination of parts to the underlying motive, it fails in its very nature. And in its perfection and completeness of structure we have, as Thomas Wentworth Higginson has said, —

the conditions of perfect art; there is no subdivision of interest; the author can strike directly in, without preface, can move with determined step toward a conclusion, and can — O highest privilege! — stop when he is done.



# INDEX

- Action in characterization. *See* Character and characterization.
- Aldrich, *Marjorie Daw*, 48, 54, 221, 236, 249, 270.
- Allen, A. V. G., *Life of Phillips Brooks*, 178.
- Allen, J. L., *Flute and Violin*, 47, 49, 54, 59-64, 153, 163, 166-72, 201-02, 236, 271, 272; *The Choir Invisible*, 154, 257, 269; *Two Gentlemen of Kentucky*, 126-27. *Amadis of Gaul*, 255.
- Anstey, *The Black Poodle*, 222-24, 270.
- Argumentation *vs.* Narration, 12-13.
- Arnold, *Sweetness and Light*, 8-9.
- Asyndeton, 39.
- Atmosphere. *See* Setting.
- Austen, *Emma*, 125.
- Autobiography, 251-53.
- Balance in massing. *See* Plot and Plot structure (Emphasis).
- Baldwin, 200, 205, 234.
- Balzac, *A Passion in the Desert*, 227-28; *La Grande Bretèche*, 196-98, 270.
- Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 178, 205.
- Bates, *Talks on Writing English*, 91-92.
- Bible, The, Apostles at Bethsaida, 21; Esther, 180, 195, 205-17, 261, 262, 269, 270; Joseph's coat, 39, 267; Messengers at the house of Simon, 20; Naaman and Elisha, 185-87, 191, 200-01; Prodigal Son, 24-26, 28, 66, 79, 117; Ruth, 261, 262, 266-67.
- Biography, 250-54; and History, 250-51. *See also* Autobiography.
- Blackmore, *Lorna Doone*, 257, 269.
- Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 159.
- Bourienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon*, 180.
- Bryce, 7-8, 117.
- Bulwer-Lytton, *Harold*, 73, 247-48; *The Coming Race*, 260; *The Last of the Barons*, 229-30.
- Burr, *The Autobiography*, 252-53.
- Cable, 84.
- Caricature. *See* Character and characterization.
- Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 51.
- Catastrophe, 215-17.
- Character and characterization —
- Clearness, 146-50; type and individual, 147-49; caricature, 149-50.
- Coherence, 172-77; exposition and evolution, 172-74; condensation, 176.
- Definition, personage and personality, 107-13.
- Direct, 114-16.
- Emphasis, 151.
- Fiction, 112-13.
- History, 176-77, 240-45.
- Indirect, 116-46; by action, 119-23; by speech, 123-43; by environment, 143-46.
- Insufficient details, 132-33.
- Point of view, 154-66; first person, 157-59; focal, 160-61; external, 161-66; objective, 162-63; subjective, 163-66.
- Unity, 150-72.
- Chester, *Forty Seconds*, 198.
- Chesterton, 54.
- Clarendon, 118-19.
- Climax, in drama, 211-13; in novel, 217-18; in short-story, 217; in plot structure, 201-24; method of chronicle, 203-05; method of drama, 205-19; method of story, 219-24.

- Coherence, in characterization, 172-77; in definition of narration, 4-5; in episodic narrative, 58-64; in item, 37-50; in plot structure, 123, 199-201; in short-story, 270-72.
- Coleridge, 106.
- Collins, 59.
- Contrast. *See* Plot structure, and setting.
- Crawford, *The Novel, What it is*, 177.
- Day, *Sandford and Merton*, 134-35.
- Definiteness in plot. *See* Plot and Plot structure.
- Definition, fundamental, 1-6.
- Defoe, 180; *Robinson Crusoe*, 111-12, 135, 158, 189, 255.
- Deland, 128; *Awakening of Helena Ritchie*, 52.
- De Morgan, 262; *Alice-for-Short*, 5.
- Dénouement, 191-92.
- De Quincey, *Autobiography*, 38-39.
- Description, insincere. *See* Setting. *Vs.* Narration, 13-18.
- Development in setting. *See* Setting.
- Dialect, 139-43.
- Dickens, 124; *Bleak House*, 5, 96, 227; *Child's Dream of a Star*, 229; *David Copperfield*, 125-26, 174-75, 181, 182, 195; *Dombey and Son*, 17-18, 135-36; *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 125-26, 149, 150-51, 152, 179; *Nicholas Nickleby*, 179, 195; *Pickwick Papers*, 96, 136, 179; *Tale of Two Cities*, 16-17, 26-27, 87-89, 92-93, 151-52, 161, 216.
- Direct characterization. *See* Character and characterization.
- Doyle, 59.
- Dramatic setting. *See* Setting.
- Eliot, 106, 113, 114, 158, 166, 257; *Adam Bede*, 52, 84, 109-11, 115-16, 120-23, 161; *Daniel Deronda*, 57, 66, 177; *Middlemarch*, 5, 151; *Romola*, 57, 83, 146, 216, 268; *Silas Marner*, 3, 9, 55, 174, 218, 258, 259; *The Mill on the Floss*, 151.
- Emotional element in history. *See* History (characteristics).
- Emphasis: in episodic narrative, 53-56; in item, 31-37; in plot, 224-38; in short-story, 272-73.
- English prose romances, 103-104.
- Environment: in character. *See* Character and characterization. In setting. *See* Setting.
- Episodic narrative, 23-28, 50-64; coherence, 58-64; emphasis, 53-56; plot structure, 199; proportion, 56-58; short-story, 271; unity, 50-53.
- Erskine, *Defence of Lord Gordon*, 13.
- Exposition in dramatic action, 208-09; *vs.* Narration, 6-12.
- Expository setting. *See* Setting.
- Falling action, 207, 213-15.
- Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 57, 262.
- Fiske, 8.
- Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, 51.
- Froude, *History of England*, 51, 84, 245.
- Gibbon, 6, 51, 84, 162, 187, 242, 245, 246.
- Glasgow, *Romance of a Plain Man*, 230.
- Godwin, *Fleetwood*, 105, 106.
- Green, A. K., 59, 84; *The Filigree Ball*, 137-39.
- Green, J. H., *Short History of the English People*, 32, 34, 51, 117, 120, 144, 145-46, 176-77, 237.
- Grote, *History of Greece*, 51, 242.
- Hale, *My Double and How He Undid Me*, 52.
- Hamilton, *Materials and Methods of Fiction*, 101, 103, 267-68.
- Hardy, 187; *Far From the Mad-ding Crowd*, 71-72, 123; *Tess of*

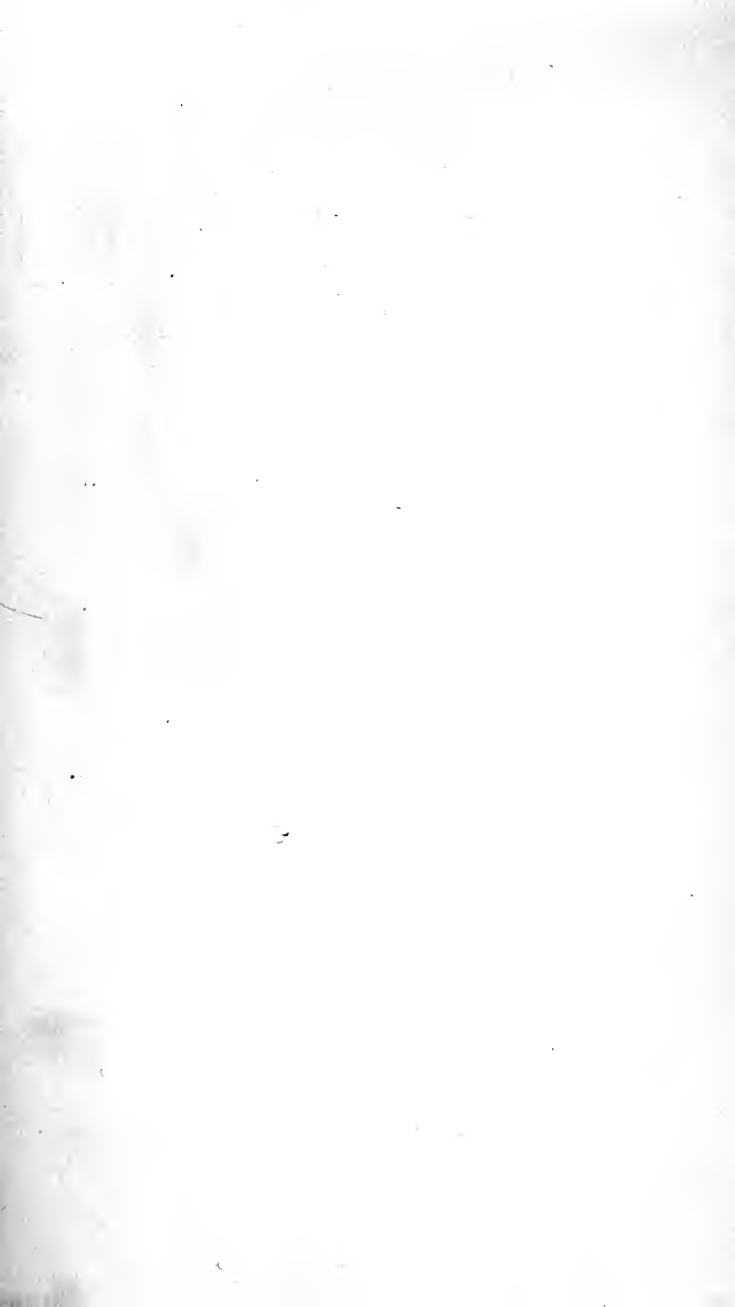
- the D'Urbervilles*, 27, 52, 76-77, 80, 140, 144, 166, 233; *The Return of the Native*, 84, 228; *The Three Strangers*, 221-22, 236, 237; *The Withered Arm*, 232, 264.
- Harmony between background and action. *See* Setting.
- Harris, *Uncle Remus and His Friends*, 142-43.
- Harte, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, 107-08, 112, 117-18, 162-63, 172-73, 264, 269.
- Hawthorne, *Note-Book*, 265, 267; *The Ambitious Guest*, 264; *The Great Stone Face*, 52, 55, 80-82, 87, 89, 112, 154, 267, 269, 271-72; *The House of the Seven Gables*, 148-49; *The Marble Faun*, 216; *The Scarlet Letter*, 5, 114.
- Heightening. *See* Rise.
- Herodotus, 244.
- Hewlett, *Richard Yea-and-Nay*, 76, 218-19, 230-31, 270; *The Madonna of the Peach Tree*, 53.
- Higginson, 273.
- History, 5-6, 239-50; characteristics, 165, 181-82, 240-45; characterization in, 246-48; plot structure, 248-50; proportion, 57-58; rank of, 239-40; setting, 245-46; unity, 50-52. *See also* Biography, and Character and characterization.
- Hoax-plot, 273.
- Holmes, Sherlock, 5.
- Hope [Hawkins], *The Dolly Dialogues*, 118.
- Horne, *The Technique of the Novel*, 112-13, 255.
- Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 73-74.
- Hume, *History of England*, 51, 52, 162, 166, 187.
- Indirect characterization. *See* Character and characterization.
- Initial stress in massing. *See* Plot, and plot structure (Emphasis).
- Intellectual elements in History. *See* History (Characteristics).
- Irving, *Rip Van Winkle*, 86, 176.
- Item, 22-23, 29-50.
- Coherence, 37-50; structure of sentences, 38-46; order of details, 46-50.
- Emphasis, 31-37.
- Unity, 29-31.
- James, 162.
- Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 84-85.
- Kingsley, *Westward Ho!* 83, 257.
- Kipling, *The Man Who would be King*, 53.
- Lafayette, *The Princess of Clèves*, 255.
- Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address*, 234-35.
- Literary Digest*, 30.
- Local color. *See* Setting.
- Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, 55.
- Lodge, 104.
- Macaulay, 54, 165, 166, 187, 242, 243, 244-45, 247; *Clive*, 34-36; *Hallam's Constitutional History of England*, 162, 241-42; *Hampden*, 228-29; *Hastings*, 102-03; *History of England*, 11-12, 41, 51, 57, 83, 118-19; *Milton*, 225-26; *Pitt*, 140-41, 152-53, 155; *Temple*, 232-33; *Walpole*, 155-56, 201, 204.
- Macmillan's Magazine*, 143.
- Mansfield, *Beau Brummel*, 174.
- Marie, 128-33, 175-76.
- Marivaux, *Marianne*, 255.
- Marryat, *Peter Simple*, 141-42.
- Massing. *See* Plot, and Plot structure.
- Matthews, 14, 261.
- Maupassant, *Happiness*, 52, 65, 74-75, 78, 264, 269; *The Necklace*, 3, 23, 48, 162-63, 173, 176, 221.
- Meredith, 113, 257; *Diana of the Crossways*, 227; *The Egoist*, 66, 112, 177; *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 162, 236.

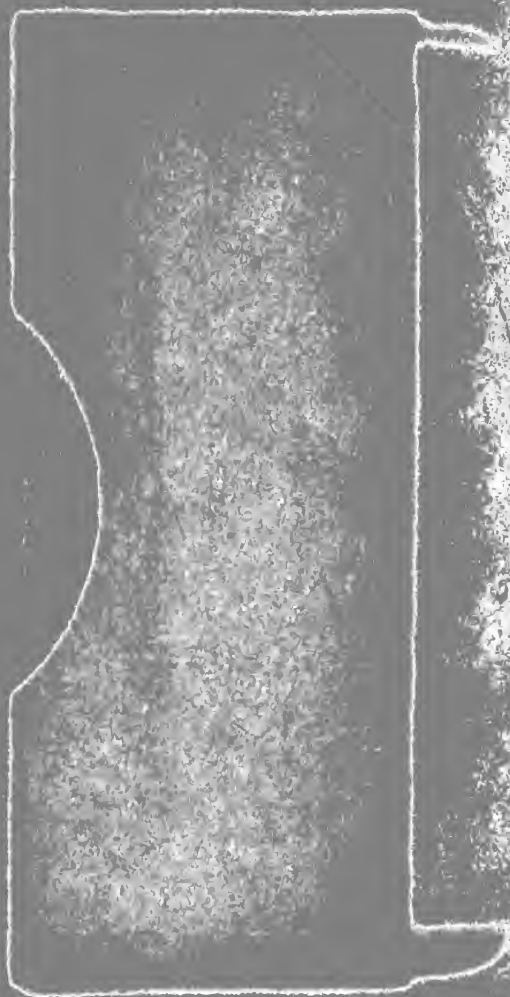
- Mérimée, *The Taking of the Redoubt*, 269-70, 271.
- Method of Chronicle, drama, and story. *See* Plot structure.
- Moment of exciting force, 209-10.
- Moment of final suspense, 213-15.
- Mommsen, *History of Rome*, 205, 246.
- Morrison, *On the Stairs*, 227-28, 271.
- Muir, *The Mountains of California*, 12-13.
- Narration, definition, 1-6; *vs.* Argumentation, 12-13; *vs.* Description, 13-18; *vs.* Exposition, 6-12.
- Newcastle, Duke of, 140-41.
- Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, 159.
- Norris, *The Pit*, 94, 95, 259.
- Novel, Climax in the, 217-18; definition, 254-57; realistic and romantic, 257-61. *See also* Character and characterization.
- Order of details in item. *See* Item.
- Page, 128.
- Palmer, *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*, 5, 156-57, 204.
- Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, 78-79, 84.
- Pathetic Fallacy, 98-101.
- Pepys, *Diary*, 159.
- Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*, 265-66.
- Personage and personality. *See* Character and characterization.
- Petrie, *Egyptian Tales*, 261.
- Phillipotts, *The Virgin in Judgment*, 94.
- Picaresque fiction, 189.
- Plot, definition, 65, 178-82; in fiction, 269-70; in history and biography, 181-82.
- Plot structure —  
     Climax, 201-04; method of chronicle, 203-05; method of drama, 205-19; method of story, 219-24.  
     Coherence, 123, 199-201.  
     Emphasis, 224-38; definiteness, 237-38; massing, 225-33.  
     Massing, 225-33; balance, 228-32; contrast, 232-33; initial position, 225-28; terminal position, 225-28. *See* Emphasis.  
     Proportion, 233-36.  
     Unity, 183-99; definition, 183-88; emotional, 187-88; intellectual, 183-87; complication, 188-93; point of view, 193-99; simplification, 198-99.
- Poe, 75-76, 263; *The Cask of Amontillado*, 264; *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 52, 269; *The Gold Bug*, 112, 235; *The Masque of the Red Death*, 269.
- Point of view. *See* Character and characterization and Plot structure.
- Prescott, *The Conquest of Peru*, 233.
- Priest, *The*, 97-98.
- Proportion in episodic narrative, 56-58; in historic narrative, 57-58; in item, 36-37; in plot structure, 233-36; in short-story, 272-73.
- Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 105.
- Raleigh, *The English Novel*, 160-61.
- Realism in fiction. *See* Novel.
- Reynard the Fox, 267.
- Rhetorical Elements in plot. *See* Plot and Plot structure.
- Rhodes, 235, 245, 246.
- Richardson, 160-61, 255, 266.
- Rising action, 207, 210-11.
- Romance. *See* Novel.
- Roosevelt, 30-31.
- Ropes, 242.
- Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 98-99.
- Saintsbury, *History of Nineteenth Century Literature*, 184.
- Scientific spirit of history. *See* History.
- Scott, 106, 179, 258; *Ivanhoe*, 56, 149, 161, 189-90, 247, 258;

- Kenilworth*, 113, 120, 146, 257, 260; *Redgauntlet* (*Wandering Willie's Tale*), 262; *Rob Roy*, 66, 194; *The Antiquary*, 260; *The Highland Widow*, 40, 54; *The Talisman*, 258; *Waverley*, 257.
- Sentence articulation. *See* Item.
- Series and succession, 199, 204-05.
- Setting, atmosphere, 85-87; contrast with action, 77-79; definition, 65-67; development, 101-06; environment, 79-82; expository and dramatic, 67-82; harmony with action, 76-77; historical narrative, in, *see* History; insincerity, 98-101; local color, 82-85; short-story, in, *see* Short-story; symbolism, 87-90; undue elaboration, 90-101.
- Shakspere, *Hamlet*, 133, 152, 153; *Julius Cæsar*, 152, 210, 212; *Macbeth*, 86, 152, 209, 212; *Othello*, 152.
- Sheldon, *The Sweat-Shop*, 14.
- Short-story, 261-73; characteristics and definition, 262-68; climax, 217; coherence, 270-72; emphasis and proportion, 272-73; plot, 269-70; setting, 269; unity, 268-70; *vs.* short-story, 261-62.
- Simplification in plot. *See* Plot and Plot structure.
- Single thread plots, 189.
- Smollett, 180.
- Southey, 106.
- Speech, gesture, etc., in character. *See* Character and characterization.
- Sidney, 104.
- Spenser, 104.
- Stevenson, 54, 106, 261; *A Humble Remonstrance*, 183-84; *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 15-16; *Markheim*, 78, 268, 271; *Memoirs and Portraits*, 44, 183-84; *The Master of Ballantrae*, 66, 160; *Treasure Island*, 5, 113, 194.
- Stockton, *The Lady or the Tiger?* 270.
- Symbolism in background. *See* Setting.
- Taine, 102.
- Tale, the, 262.
- Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King*, 155.
- Terminal stress in massing. *See* Plot and Plot structure (Emphasis).
- Testimony, undesigned, 137-39.
- Thackeray, 166, 261; *Henry Esmond*, 47, 48, 49, 152, 157-58, 160, 192, 257; *Pendennis*, 125-26; *The Newcomes*, 133, 136, 152, 153, 161, 259, 261; *Vanity Fair*, 52, 151, 152, 164-65, 233. *Thousand-and-One-Nights*, *A*, 261, 267.
- Thucydides, 242.
- Title, as expressive of episodic unity, 52.
- Tragic moment, 212.
- Trollope, 261.
- Type and individual. *See* Character and characterization.
- Undue elaboration of background. *See* Setting.
- Unity, in character, *see* Character and characterization; in episodic narrative, *see* Episodic narrative; in fundamental definition, 4-5; in historic narrative, *see* History; in item, *see* Item; in plot, *see* Plot and Plot structure; in short-story, *see* Short-story.
- Virgil, *Æneid*, 48.
- Von Holst, 249.
- Ward, 59, 177.
- Wendell, 34.
- Wilkins-Freeman, *A New England Nun*, 84, 127, 132, 144-45, 264, 269.
- Windle, *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy*, 70-71.
- Zola, 80.

**The Riverside Press**  
**CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS**  
**U . S . A**







125142

Maxcy, Carroll Lewis  
Rhetorical principles of narration.

LaE.Gr  
M463r

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
LIBRARY

Do not  
remove  
the card  
from this  
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket  
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."  
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

